

VAMPI
#103



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VAMPIRELLA

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**VAMPIRELLA...
THE UNDERSEA
LOVE SLAVE OF
"THE LAST
PRINCE!"**



**GALA
CHRISTMAS
SPECIAL!**

WITH:

**PANTHA!
THE FOX!
ST. KNIGHT!**

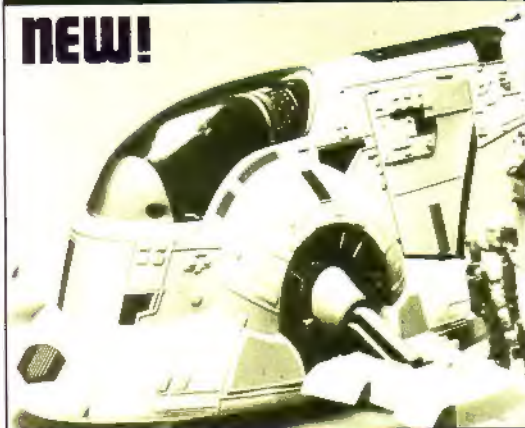


THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

INCREDIBLE MODELS & SETS FROM THE MOST EXCITING MOVIE EVER!

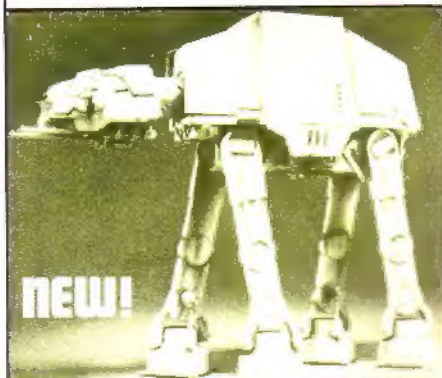
SLAVE 1: BOBA FETT'S SPACESHIP

new!



SLAVE 1: An exciting replica of the evil Boba Fett's ship! Highly detailed ship has movable ramp into the cargo hold, adjustable seat for landing and flight positions, adjustable wings that lock for cruise control! The clicking, moving laser cannons will protect Slave 1 from any pursuit ships. The craft will hold at least three action figures beside Boba when the side panel is removed! A frozen Han Solo figurine is included! This is a functional toy that requires no batteries! Action figure not included. #26299—\$24.95

AT-AT WALKER



new!

ALL-TERRAIN ARMORED TRANSPORT: Highly detailed 8" tall replica of the deadly walkers! The legs and head control room are moveable! #24256—\$7.25

new!



THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

TURRET & PROBOT PLAY SET

TURRET AND PROBOT PLAYSET: Watch out Rebels! Probot is looking for you! You can relive the dramatic battle on the ice planet Hoth with this deluxe playset! You can eject the Probot with the action lever that you control! For added thrills, there's a realistic Rebel Laser Gun-Turret. Action figures fit inside through the opening side door and into the hatch on top. Turret laser cannon clicks as it turns! Intricately detailed and colorful plastic Probot and laser Turret are just what you need to kindle your imagination and authenticate the world of your Star Wars action figures! Durable plastic will last for years! Action figures sold separately! #26297—\$15.95

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new!



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new!



BATTLE ON ICE PLANET HOTH: Darth Vader's Imperial troops attack the rebel stronghold in this 12"x18" action scene! Included are terrain base, three snap together attack walkers, an x-wing fighter, a scout walker, three snow speeders and almost fifty figures! #24257—\$9.95

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MARCH 1982

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Vampi's Scarlet Letters

The issue following a "blockbuster" anniversary special is often a bit of a let-down, and, even though Vampi's 100th issue was no great shakes, #101 was still a substandard effort.

"Attack of the Starbeast" was a routine 'Monster from Hell Destroying Humankind' type story, even if said monster was depicted as coming from outer space. Vampi's method of dispatching the creature was, however, refreshingly pedestrian. It's nice to see magic spells and psychic forces ignored for once.

In "Hell on Earth," on the other hand, Cassandra St. Knight had to contend with a literal invasion of demons. Thus, we were subjected to all sorts of "dazzling" psychic forces, complete with an if-all-good-people-of-good-will-wish-for-something-it-will-come-true solution to the demons, and a similarly abrupt and unsatisfying rescue of St. Knight from the Lord of the Black Host.

If any character has a more confused and contradictory and oft-changed background than Vampi, it's Pantha. This issue's story served mainly to give us Rich Margopoulos' version of her tumultuous and rather sordid past. My advice: stick to one version or forget trying to rewrite the past.

What I thought was a limited series shows signs of turning into a permanent feature, which is all to the good if the quality stays high. I speak, of course, of "The Fox," which was once again the highlight of the issue. The turmoil of the collapse of the last Chinese monarchy and the cultural, political, and economic conflict of the East-West confrontation, provide a fine milieu in which Nicola Cuti has created a fascinating story.

T.M. MAPLE
Toronto, Ontario

The Pantha series that is currently running is one of her best adventures in a long time. Zombies, bigfoot monsters, mad scientists, and mobsters are only some of the elements that this series has gathered. When we left off in Vampi #101, Pantha was being thrown to the crocodiles, Adam was about to be burnt at the stake...there were more cliffhangers per page than any series I can think of! Tremendous!

Author Rich Margopoulos kept the action moving at a breakneck pace and Jose Ortiz drew Pantha with his customary skill and style, using his pen with great economy for the maximum effect. The climax to this series should be a smash!

JAY HELLECK
Reno, Nevada

"The Fox" is the best new series Warren Publishing has presented in centuries, it seems. The spare and poetic writing of Nicola Cuti and the mastery of artist Luis Bermejo create magic. They truly work as a team. It takes them no more than one or two panels to introduce a character and then have the reader cheer or hiss the character and understand them. With some artist-writer teams, this may take pages or whole stories...and sometimes it never happens at all.

We should appreciate "The Fox" while we have it, because I would be willing to bet my house and mortgage that it is not sexy, violent, or superhero-like enough to please the masses of comic book fans. I'm afraid that it will be history before too long.

JACK CRIST
Atlanta, Ga.

Like everyone else who vent their opinions in Vampi's Scarlet Letters, I wish that Jose Gonzalez was still drawing Vampi. I do agree that he was the best.

But it is high time that everyone recognize that Gonzalo Mayo is an excellent artist in his own right. Vampirella loses none of her haunting beauty under Mayo. His other characters are powerfully rendered as well, as are his creatures, his action sequences, his landscapes...all are drawn with care and skill. Mayo never skimps. He takes evident pride in his work. Vampirella readers would be fortunate if Mayo draws their heroine from now on.

LOUIE FURMAN
Troy, N.Y.

I very much enjoyed learning about Pantha's past in Chapter Four of "A Night Full of Zombies!" It is information like that, presented in an entertaining fashion, that makes a comic character a more fully realized and recognizable human being.

I do wish, though, that Pantha's past was not so full of forced depravity. I guess I like to think of my heroes (read heroines) as being pure as the driven snow. God knows that no one I've ever met in real life is that blameless.

TROY BILLINGHAM
Ann Arbor, Mich.

"Victims" in Vampi #101 sure was one of the dumbest stories I've come across in a long time. It was all an excuse for a moronic twist that surprised no one. The artwork was fine, but no one could have saved that story. The only redeeming feature: its brief, three page length.

DREW FROST
New York, N.Y.

Enough! Cassandra St. Knight is flying so high on the psychic plain that she long ago flew right over our heads and out of our hearts! The installment in VAMPIRELLA #101 was the living end! Give us a break with this business of "alighting on the highest pinnacle of the causal plane" and penetrating the "psychic breach" and "gazing into the tiera with your third eye."

This is the kind of doubletalk that gives Alexander Haig a bad name, and renders academic types incapable of communicating with any but their own kind!

But the ultimate joke was the panel in "Hell on Earth" that showed a heavenly host in white robes gathering together to ooh and ommm, so to speak.

I had hoped for better things from this series. There is no reason on earth that a psychic cannot be a hero, and have otherworldly adventures...but the vague and anything-goes quality that has taken over St. Knight is making the series unendurable and ludicrous.

J. GETTZ
New Orleans, Louisiana

Something about Vampi #101 pleased me no end, and it took me a while to figure out what it was: exotic locales. Pantha was in Haiti, and "The Fox" as always, takes place in turn of the century China (St. Knight's trip to the astral plane doesn't count. That was nowhere!). I will have to look into back issues to see if there are more obvious instances of this, the simple sensual pleasure of being taken away from the humdrum.

It is no secret in the publishing business that taking the readers away in time and geography is a good start on pleasing the reader. The Gothic Romances are based on just this premise. But comic books often fail us in this, because when comics take us away, it is usually to a place that is much worse than our own home towns...beast-infested swamps and lands of the living dead. Though there is danger in Haiti for Pantha, artist Jose Ortiz and author Rich Margopoulos have tried to give us some of the local color and customs. I, for one, appreciate their efforts very much.

LIBBY SOLON
Salem, Mass.

**Vampi's
Scarlet Letters**
C/O WARREN PUBLISHING
115 EAST 32nd STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016



VAMPIRELLA

A SENSUOUS *BEAUTY* DIVES SERENELY THROUGH SUN-DAPPLED *DEPTHS*! HER NAME IS *VAMPIRELLA* ...AND SHE IS A *HUNTRESS* FROM THE *STARS* NOW SELF-EXILED ON *EARTH*, THE SOLE *SURVIVOR* OF AN EXTINCT, *VAMPIRIC* ALIEN RACE!

THE LAST PRINCE!

IT IS *RARE* THAT SHE CAN TAKE A *RESPITE* FROM HER SEEMINGLY ENDLESS *BATTLE* AGAINST DARK *EVIL* AND *OCCULT FORCES*...AND RARER STILL THAT SHE HAS A MOMENT TO *SAVOR* THE PRISTINE *GLORY* OF HER ADOPTED *HOMEWORLD*!

MOST IMPORTANTLY, HOWEVER, THE *SILENCE* AND *PEACE* OF THE DEEP SEA *LULLS* HER INTO *FORGETFULNESS*! FOR A WHILE, SHE CAN ERASE *ADAM* FROM HER *MIND*! *ADAM*...THE MAN WHO LEFT HER...*LOVELESS* AND *DESOLATE*!

WITHOUT WARNING, AS VAMPIRELLA GLIDES PAST THE SHADOW-SPLOTCHED REEF...SHE SUDDENLY FINDS HERSELF CAUGHT IN AN IRRESISTABLE RIPTIDE!



THE RAVEN-HAIRED VOLUPTUARY STRUGGLES HELPLESSLY AGAINST THE PULL OF THE INKY ABYSS! THE CURRENT SWIRLS, BEGINS TO MADLY SPIN...



...AND VAMPIRELLA FINDS HERSELF SUCKED INTO THE FATHOMLESS MAW OF AN UNCHARTED, SUB-SEA WHIRLPOOL!



WHILE ABOVE, TWO OF VAMPIRELLA'S CLOSE COMPANIONS ...THE AGED STAGE MAGICIAN PENDRAGON AND HER ROOMMATE, CRYSSIE COLLINS...REACT IN SHOCKED ALARM!



CRYSSIE! COME BACK! IF VAMPIRELLA, WITH HER UNEARTHLY STRENGTH, COULDN'T SAVE HERSELF...HOW CAN YOU?!







YOU MEAN
I'M TRAPPED
HERE...MAROONED...
FOR ALL TIME
TO COME?!



IN SO MANY WORDS,
I FEAR, YES! BUT IT
IS NOT AS BAD AS IT
SOUNDS! MARIE! TAKE
VAMPIRELLA TO HER
QUARTERS...

"...AND HELP HER SELECT AN APPROPRIATE
WARDROBE FROM OUR VAST STORES!"



OH,
THIS SILK
GOWN IS
PRICELESS! HOW
DID YOU
GET IT?!

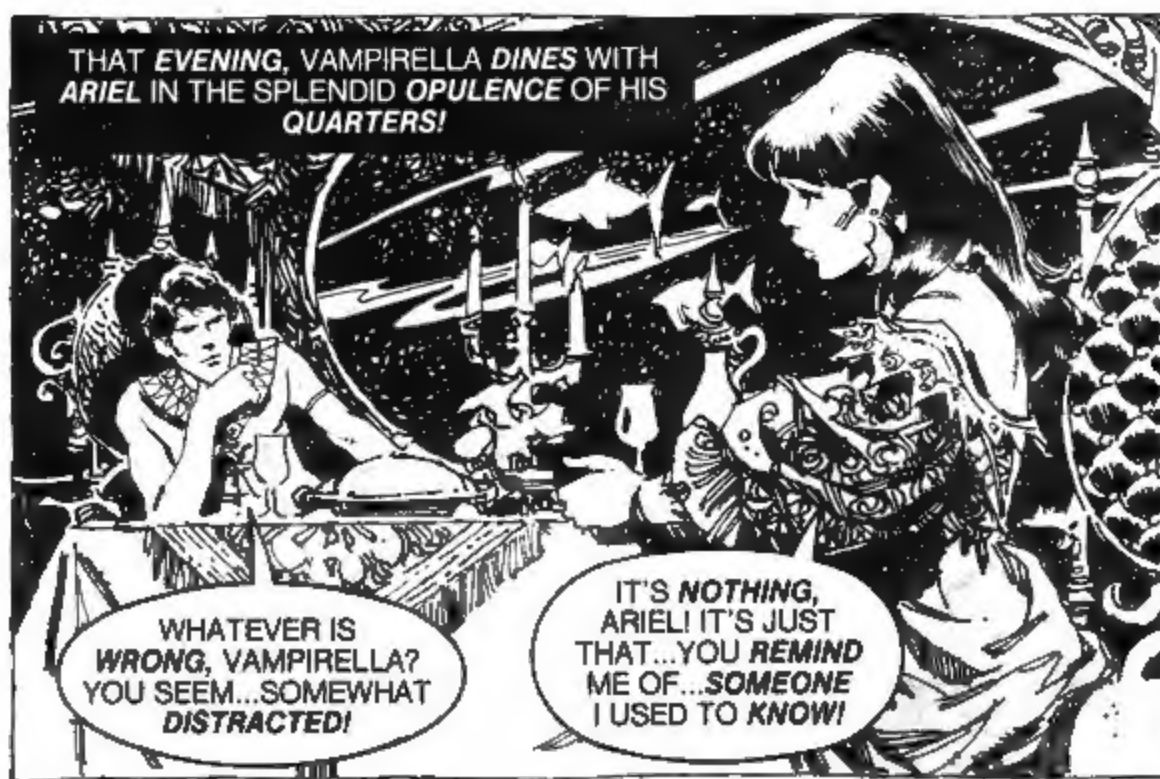
SHIPWRECKED
TREASURES ARE
CONSTANTLY PULLED
INTO THE VORTEX!
CENTURIES OF
WEALTH ARE OURS
FOR THE
TAKING!



I...
I STILL CAN'T
BELIEVE THAT
I'LL NEVER SEE
THE SURFACE
WORLD...OR MY
FRIENDS...EVER
AGAIN!



BUT IT IS SO,
VAMPIRELLA! YOU
MUST ACCEPT IT...
IF YOU ARE TO BE
HAPPY HERE!



THAT EVENING, VAMPIRELLA DINES WITH
ARIEL IN THE SPLENDID OPULENCE OF HIS
QUARTERS!

WHATEVER IS
WRONG, VAMPIRELLA?
YOU SEEM...SOMEWHAT
DISTRACTED!

IT'S NOTHING,
ARIEL! IT'S JUST
THAT...YOU REMIND
ME OF...SOMEONE
I USED TO KNOW!



IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS THAT FOLLOW, THE PRINCE OVERWHELMS VAMPIRELLA WITH HIS LOVE!



AND BECAUSE SHE HAS GONE FAR TOO LONG WITHOUT A MAN LIKE THIS, SHE SURRENDERS TO THE ECSTASY OF HIS TENDER EMBRACE!



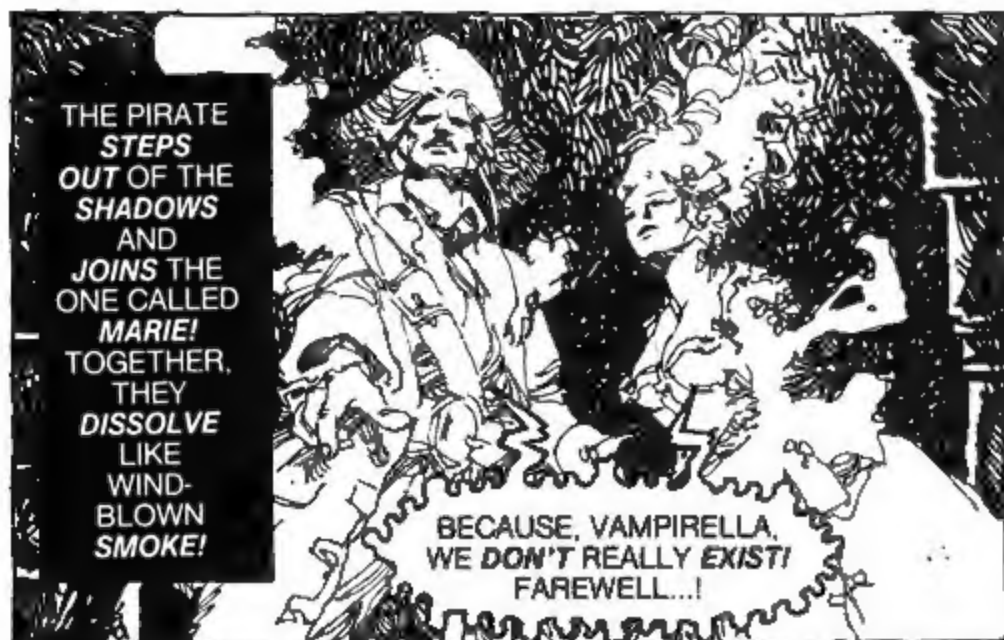
THEIR AFFAIR IS ONE OF PASSION AND FORBIDDEN PLEASURE! THEY PLUMB ONE ANOTHER BODY AND SOUL...A SHARED CARESS EXPRESSING THE DEEPEST OF UNDERSTANDING!



THEN, ONE NIGHT, A SERPENT SLITHERS INTO PARADISE!



VAMPIRELLA! WAKE UP...!





SOME GO MAD AND KILL IN AN UTTERLY FIENDISH FASHION. OTHERS COMMIT SUICIDE, THEIR ONLY ESCAPE! I DID NOT WANT THIS FOR YOU! I WANTED TO DAZZLE YOU MAKE YOU HAPPY HERE WITH ME!

SO I USED TELEPATHIC HYPNOSIS MAKING YOU BELIEVE OTHERS OWELLED WITH ME! AND THAT I WAS SOMEONE I AM NOT!



BUT I FELT GUILTY ABOUT DECEIVING YOU! WHILE I DREAMT, MY UNCONSCIOUS MIND, ACTING THROUGH MY MENTAL CREATIONS, WARNED YOU OF THE TRUE REALITY OF THIS, MY HOME!



EVEN MY VISAGE IS A FRAUD AND DECEPTION!

WHEN I FIRST FOUND YOU, I PSYCHICALLY PLUCKED A FOND IMAGE OF A MAN FROM YOUR THOUGHTS AND MADE YOU SEE HIM IN ME!



THIS IS HOW I TRULY LOOK! AFTER ALL I'VE DONE, CAN YOU STILL LOVE ME, VAMPIRELLA, MY PRECIOUS ONE?

YOU ARE VERY HANDSOME, ARIEL! BUT EVEN IF YOU WEREN'T ...I MEASURE A MAN BY THE GOODNESS IN HIS HEART! AND IT IS BECAUSE OF YOUR GIVING HEART THAT I HAVE COME TO LOVE YOU!



BUT OUR RELATIONSHIP CAN'T GROW IN ISOLATION! WITHOUT OTHERS AGAINST WHOM WE CAN TEST OURSELVES WE WILL WITHER AND DIE! WE MUST RETURN TO THE SURFACE!

WITH A REASSURING SQUEEZE OF HER HAND, VAMPIRELLA LEADS THE PRINCE OUT OF THE CITADEL, ACROSS THE DRY SEA FLOOR...

AND INTO THE SWIRLING VORTEX!
SWIMMING FRANTICALLY,
DESPERATELY...THE LEMURIAN USES
HIS TELEPATHIC POWERS TO JOIN
HIS MIND WITH VAMPIRELLA'S!



YOU SPEAK WISELY, DEAR ONE!
I HAVE TRIED TO LEAVE MANY TIMES
IN THE PAST BUT THE WHIRLPOOL...
AND MY OWN FEAR...ALWAYS DEFEATED
ME! PERHAPS TOGETHER WE SHALL
SUCCEED WHERE I ALONE FAILED!

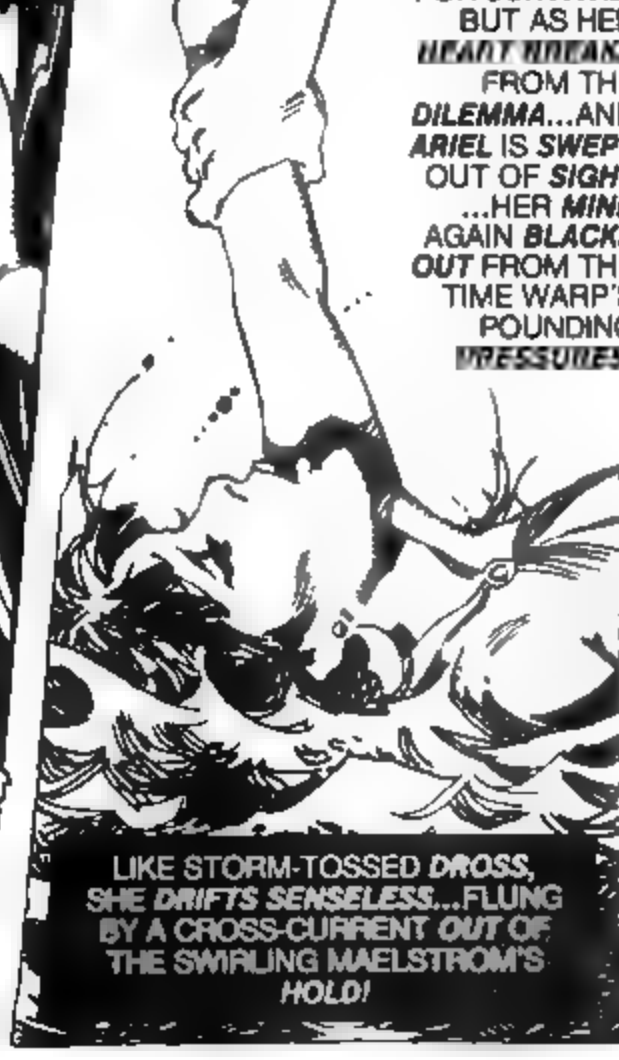
FIGHTING AGAINST THE ROARING TIDE,
THEY CLIMB UPWARDS...UNTIL THE
PRINCE'S STRENGTH BEGINS TO WANE
AND HE FLOUNDERS, SLIPPING FROM HER
GRASP!



ARIEL--!

IT IS
NO USE,
DARLING!
THE WATERS
AGAIN
DEFEAT ME!
BUT YOU
MUST GO
ON! AND
REMEMBER
I LOVE YOU
WILL
LOVE YOU
ALWAYS!

VAMPIRELLA IS
TORN BETWEEN
HER LOVE FOR
HER MAN AND
HER INSTINCT
FOR SURVIVAL!
BUT AS HER
HEART BREAKS
FROM THE
DILEMMA...AND
ARIEL IS SWEEPED
OUT OF SIGHT
...HER MIND
AGAIN BLACKS
OUT FROM THE
TIME WARP'S
POUNDING
PRESSURES!



LIKE STORM-TOSSED DROSS,
SHE DRIFTS SENSELESS...FLUNG
BY A CROSS-CURRENT OUT OF
THE SWIRLING MAELSTROM'S
HOLD!

MINUTES LATER, THE BLACK SHROUD
OVER HER MIND LIFTS...AND SHE
FINDS HERSELF SAFE WITH CRYSSIE
AND PEN UNDER A DAZZLING BLUE
SKY!



OOHH!
I-VE GOT
TO GO BACK!
THE PRINCE--!
HE HE'S
STILL DOWN
THERE!

"THERE IS NO ONE ELSE,"
EXPLAINS PENDRAGON! "BY
THE TIME CRYSSIE FOUND
YOU, YOU WERE HALF-DEAD!
WHEN YOU STARTED TO RUN
OUT OF AIR, YOUR MIND
MUST'VE PLAYED TRICKS ON
YOU!"



BUT VAMPIRELLA'S HEART RIOTS AGAINST
PENDRAGON'S EXPLANATION! WEEKS
COULD HAVE PASSED IN THE TIMELESS,
UNDERSEA REALM...WHILE ONLY
SECONDS PASSED IN THE SURFACE
WORLD! IT COULD HAVE HAPPENED JUST
AS SHE REMEMBERS IT! THEN AGAIN...



THUS, VAMPIRELLA ALWAYS
WONDERS...WAS IT A DREAM...A
TEASING KALEIDOSCOPE OF
ADAM-INSPIRED IMAGES...OR HAD
SHE REALLY LOVED A LOST PRINCE
IN A CITADEL UNDER THE SEA?

CASSANDRA ST. KNIGHT

THE BLIZZARD RAGES... ITS WIND A MAD-FRAUGHT SCREAM OF PUNISHING COLD! SNOW HISSES ALONG THE MOUNTAIN GRIDS, CLOAKING THE BARREN EMPTINESS WITH A SHROUD OF WHITE! TINY AND ALMOST INSIGNIFICANT, A LONE FIGURE TRUDGES THROUGH KNEE-DEEP DRIFTS!

HIGH ATOP A MOUNTAIN CLIFF, A TIBETAN MONASTERY BECKONS TO THE WEARY CLIMBER! IT HOLDS THE PROMISE OF SAFETY IN THIS FROZEN WASTELAND...

BUT LOOKS, A REFLECTION OF REALITY ITSELF, CAN BE DECEIVING!

THE

MEPHISTO LIST!

THE FUR-BEDECKED TRAVELER IS **CASSANDRA ST. KNIGHT**! HER ENTRANCE IS, AS ALWAYS, **DRAMATIC AND FORMIDABLE!**

BAMM!

I HAVE ARRIVED! TAKE ME TO THE HIGH LAMA MASTER LAYA!

EH--?!

AND IN THE CHAMBER OF MASTER LAYA, ABBOT OF THE ISOLATED HOLY RETREAT...

THE FEARSOME **MEPHISTO LIST** WAS PLACED IN OUR **SAFEKEEPING**! NOW IT IS GONE **STOLEN!**

BOTH OF YOU, KAMASANG AND MOHENJO, STAND ACCUSED OF THE THEFT! WHAT WORDS HAVE YOU IN YOUR OWN DEFENSE?

I, I AM INNOCENT!

AS AM I, MASTER!

YOU MENTALLY SUMMONED ME, SRI LAYA! I HAVE COME!

AH, **CASSANDRA**! I KNOW OF YOU FROM MY **ASTRAL JOURNEYS**! IT HEARTENS ME THAT YOU HAVE RESPONDED TO MY TELEPATHIC CALL!

HOW CAN I BE OF SERVICE?

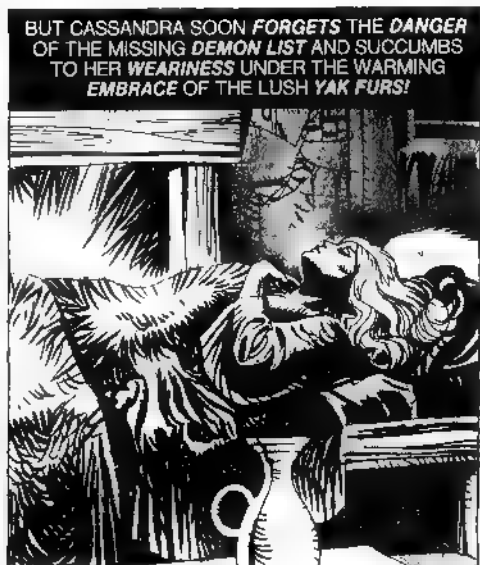
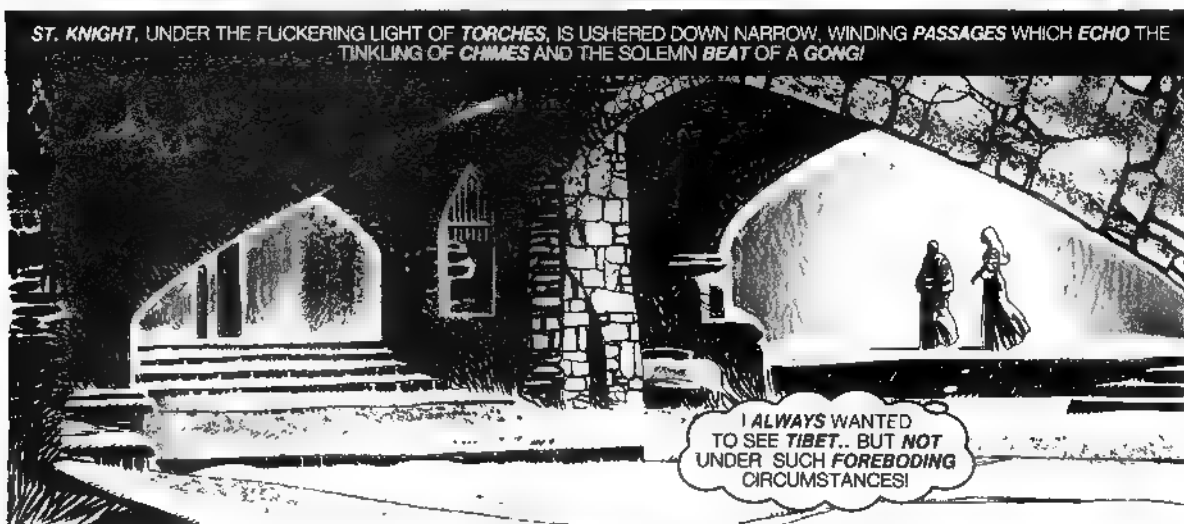
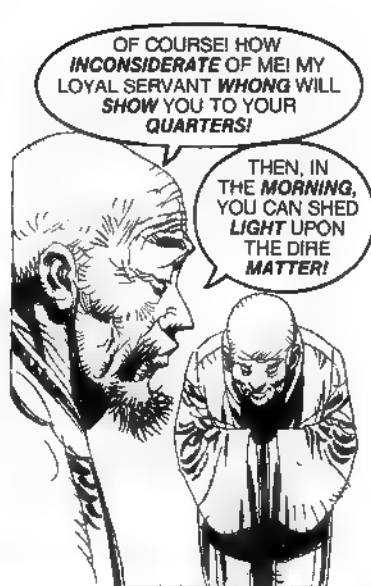
AN ANCIENT **PARCHMENT** HAS BEEN TAKEN... THE DREAD **MEPHISTO LIST**!

WITH IT, ONE VERSED IN **BLACK MAGIC** COULD INFLICT A THOUSAND DEMONS ON THE WORLD... CREATING ALL MANNER OF UTTER HAVOC!

I BELIEVE ONE OF MY TWO DISCIPLES HAS **ABSCONDED** WITH THE TIME-LESS **SCROLL**. BUT BOTH DENY THEIR GUILT!

AMAZING! I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DISCERN THE INNOCENT FROM THE GUILTY WITH MY ABILITY TO READ THEIR AURAS!

BUT THE THIEF MUST BE USING THE LIST TO CLOUD MY MYSTIC SENSES!





SILENCE REIGNS IN THE LOOMING MONASTERY AS THE WIND ABATES OUTSIDE, AND THE SNOWFLAKES FALL QUIETLY UPON THE CRAGGY PEAKS!

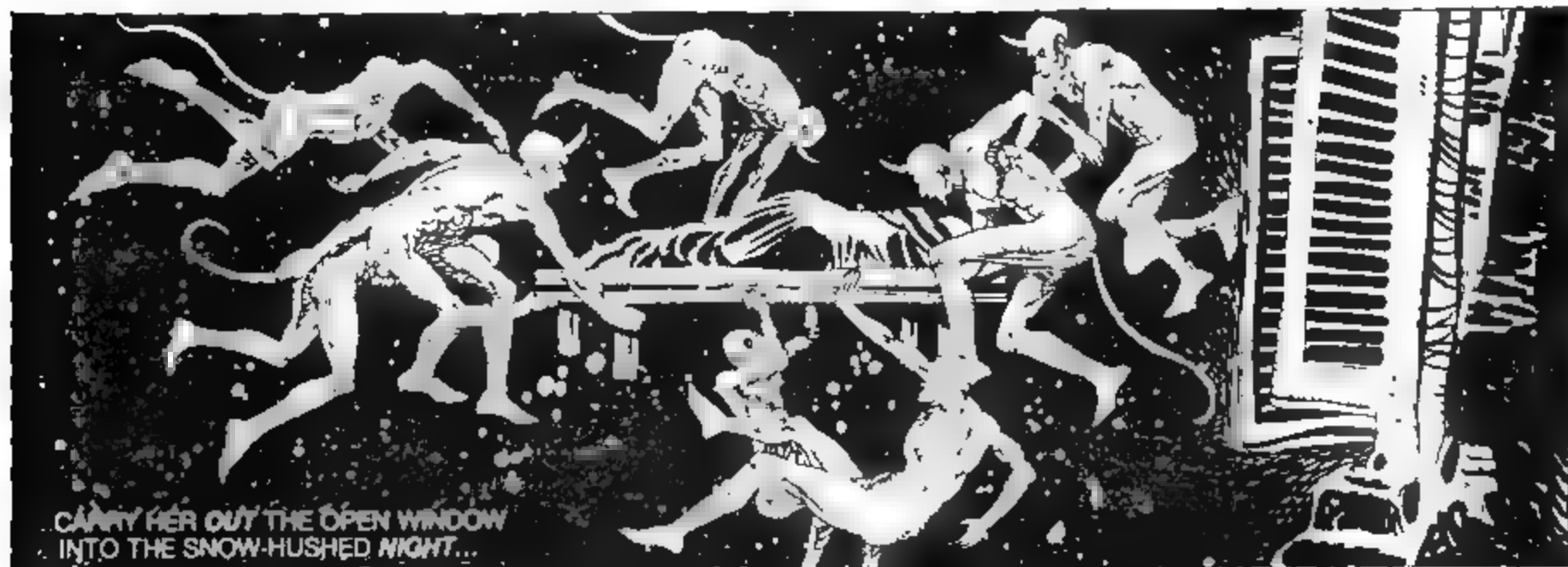
ONE HOUR TRANSPIRES, THEN ANOTHER ..



...WHEN, SUDDENLY, A DEMON'S BLACK HAND SHOVES IN THE WOODEN SHUTTERS IN CASSANDRA'S ROOM!



OTHER DEMONS GENTLY AND QUIETLY LIFT CASSANDRA'S BED..



CARRY HER OUT THE OPEN WINDOW INTO THE SNOW-HUSHED NIGHT...



...AND WITH LOATHSOME SHRIEKS OF SADISTIC DELIGHT...DROP HER!



THAT BLAST OF ICY AIR! WHA--!



I...I'M
FALLING. !



ONLY
SECONDS
BEFORE
IMPACT!
ONLY--!



KA-KRASH!



I MANAGED TO
SHIELD MYSELF WITH A
GLOBE OF SOLID MIND-
FORCE...JUST IN
TIME...!

SOMEONE TRIED
TO KILL ME. THE SAME
PERSON, NO DOUBT, WHO
POSSESSES THE MEPHISTO
LIST ...!

CASSANDRA'S SPHERE **MELTS AWAY** AS IT **CARRIES HER BACK**
THROUGH HER OPEN **WINDOW...** WHERE SHE **CONFRONTS SRI**
LAYA AND WHONG!



SRI
LAYA!

ST. KNIGHT! YOU ARE
SAFE! I SENSED **DISTRESS**
IN MY SLEEP. **WORRIED**
YOU WERE **DEAD!**



YOUR
SENSES DID
NOT DECEIVE
YOU, MASTER!
YOUR TWO
DISCIPLES--!
WE MUST CHECK
ON THEM AT
ONCE!

IF THE GUILTY
ONE BECOMES SKILLED
IN EXPLOITING THE MEPHISTO
LIST, IT MIGHT BECOME
IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP HIM
AND THE WORLD WOULD BE
FORCED TO BOW TO
HIS EVIL!



THE
SILVER-
TRESSED
PSYCHIC,
THE ABBOT,
AND THE
MAN-
SERVANT
RUSH
DOWN A
TWISTING
PASSAGE...



...ONLY TO FIND A SCENE OF
UTTER CARNAGE!

"GASP!"
DEAD! BOTH
OF THEM! BUT
WHY? FOR WHAT
REASON?

IT IS MOST
OBVIOUS TO ME,
CASSANDRA! MOHENJO
IS THE GUILTY
PARTY!



HE STABBED HIS RIVAL,
KAMASANG. BUT YOU STILL
REMAINED A THREAT TO HIM! WHEN HE
FAILED JUST NOW TO KILL YOU AS WELL,
HE TOOK HIS OWN LIFE
IN DISGRACE!



AM SURE THAT
A THOROUGH SEARCH OF THE
GROUNDS WILL UNCOVER THE
HIDDEN LIST!

I CANNOT
THANK YOU ENOUGH!
YOU MAY DEPART
TOMORROW!



LEAVE? SO YOU CAN
EASILY STRIKE ME DOWN ON
SOME ICY, OUT-OF-THE-
WAY TRAIL?!

YOU YOU
THINK I STOLE
THE PROFANE LIST
AND SLEW TWO OF
MY BELOVED
DISCIPLES?

WHO ELSE? YOU HAD
ACCESS TO THE PARCHMENT!
YOU ALSO KNEW THAT AS
SOON AS I SENSED DANGER
I WOULD COME HERE!

SO RATHER
THAN WAIT,
YOU LURED ME
HERE WITH A
MENTAL PLEA
IN HOPES OF
CATCHING ME
UNAWARE!

ADMIT
IT! YOU—
I UNNH!

M-MY THIRD EYE
AWARENESS THROBBING!
PERIL CONFRONTS ME! BUT
NOT FROM SRI LAYA!
FROM

...WHONG!

YES WHONG, THE
TRUSTED SERVANT! THE
POWERLESS ONE!

I WANTED
POWER AND
I TOOK THE
LIST KNOWING
THAT MOHENJO
OR KAMASANG
WOULD BE
ACCUSED!

BUT
I DID NOT
COUNT ON
LAYA
PSYCHICALLY
CALLING FOR
HELP! WHEN
I FAILED TO
MURDER YOU
TONIGHT

I ORDERED
MY DEMONS TO SLAY THE
TWO DISCIPLES! I COULD
NOT ALLOW SUSPICION TO
FALL UPON MYSELF...

FOR I NEEDED
TIME! TIME TO MASTER
THESE DEMONS! BUT NOW
I MUST RELEASE THEM
AND HOPE TO CONTROL
THEM! FOR YOU HAVE
DISCOVERED MY SECRET
AND MUST DIE!

KILL THEM,
MY PETS! KILL
THEM BOTH!

SRI LAYA! BEWARE!
THE CONJURED DEMONS ARE
LITERALLY LEAPING FROM
THE HELLISH SCROLL!



DOZENS OF THE MEWLING, SCREECHING DEMONS BELCH FORTH FROM THE PARCHMENT AND DESCEND ON THE PSYCHIC PAIR. THEIR TALONS EAGER TO REND AND RAKE FRAGILE FLESH!



end

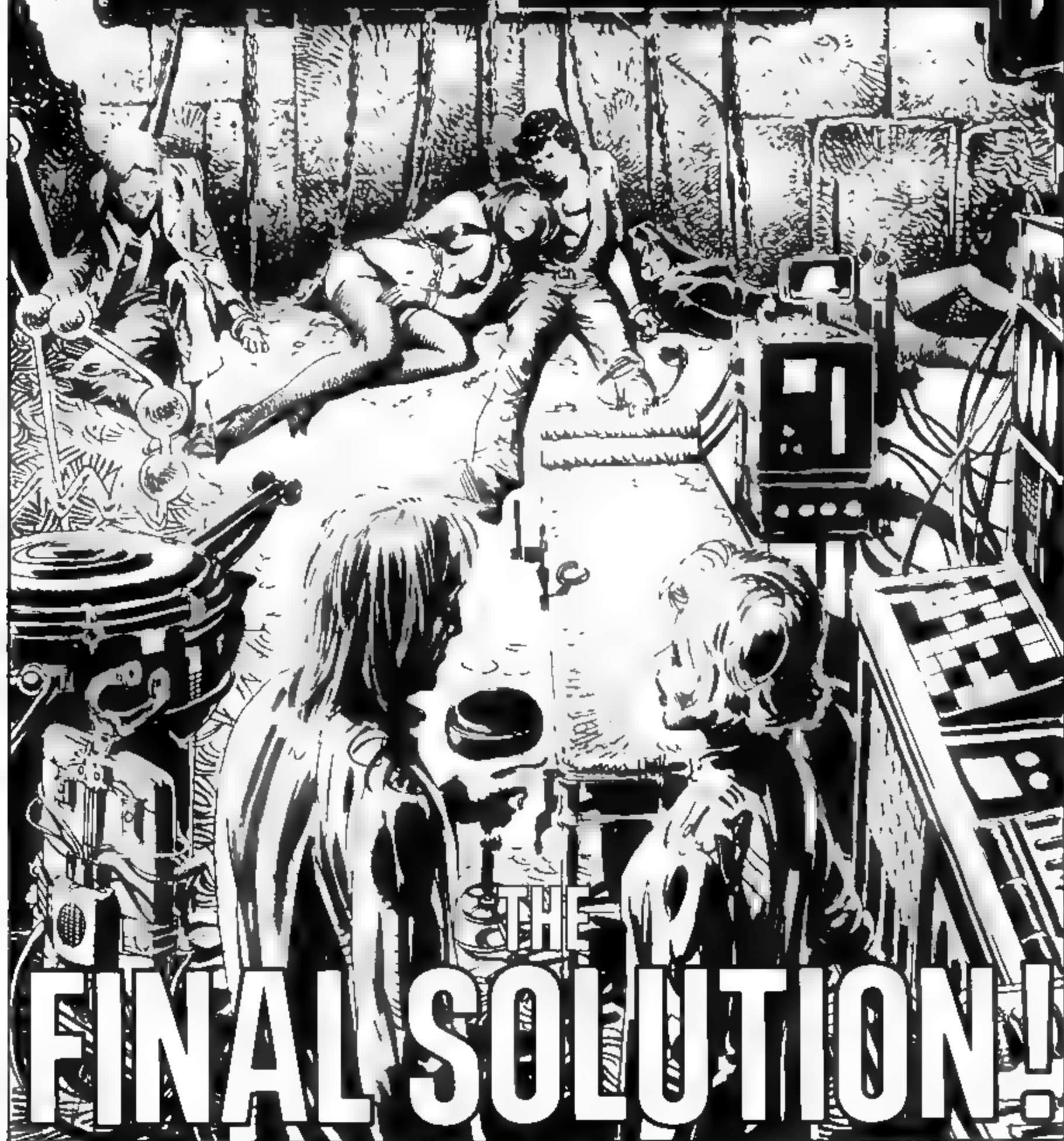
PANTHA

A NIGHT FULL OF ZOMBIES

CHAPTER SIX

AFTER SMASHING CRIME BOSS ANTHONY MUNROE'S DRUG RING AND HIS ARMY OF ZOMBIE SLAVES IN HAITI, PANTHA, ADAM, AND MOONCHILD RETURNED TO CHATEAU ICTUS, AN OLD FRENCH FORTRESS!

THERE THEY WERE IMMEDIATELY ATTACKED AND BATTERED UNCONSCIOUS BY A SHAGGY-HAIRED BRUTE...HALF-MAN, HALF-APE...AND TAKEN CAPTIVE BY DR. IMMANUEL ICTUS, A CRAZED SCIENTIST AND FORMER COLLEAGUE OF CONRAD VAN HELSING!



THE FINAL SOLUTION!



UHHN--! TH-
THE LAST THING
I REMEMBER WAS
GETTING SLAPPED
SILLY BY THAT
TRAINED APE,
AND--!

WHA--!
THESE
CHAINS...?
HOW HOW
DID--?!



PANTHA'S AWAKE,
IMMANUELI!

YES, HER
STAMINA IS
JUST AS
I PREDICTED
TRULY
REMARKABLE!
SHE IS
EXACTLY WHAT
WE'VE BEEN
LOOKING
FOR!



AND BY THE WAY,
THAT WAS NO TRAINED
APE! HARDLY! THAT WAS
MY SON...THE RESULT
OF MY EXPERIMENT IN
CROSS-BREEDING SPECIES
SOME YEARS AGO!



YOU'RE NUTS,
RICTUS, IF YOU THINK
YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH
THIS! WHY, I--!

THREATS WILL
GAIN YOU LITTLE,
PANTHA! MY EX-
COLLEGE CAPTURED
ME WHILE YOU WERE
GONE! AND I SEE
NOW...HE IS
QUITE MAD!



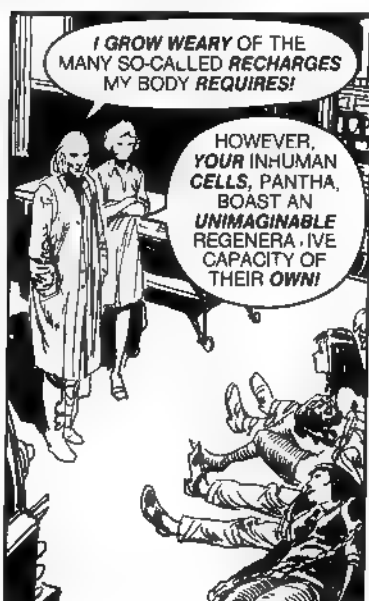
MAD, AM I? THAT
WILL BE ENOUGH OUT OF
YOU, CONRAD, OLD FRIEND!
THIS DRUG SHALL KEEP YOU
QUIET WHILE I ATTEND
TO PANTHA!

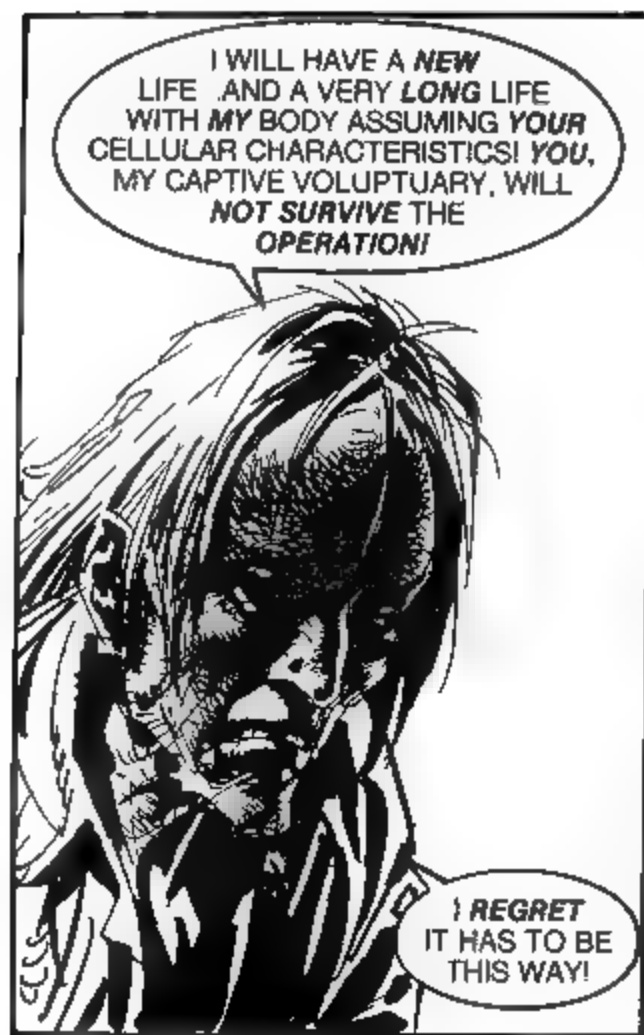


PERHAPS SHE
CAN APPRECIATE
MY GENIUS WHERE
YOU CANNOT !



"I REALIZED MY FIRST
SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH
SEVERAL YEARS BACK,
WHILE WORKING ON
A DEVICE TO
REGENERATE DISEASED
TISSUE...!"





I WILL HAVE A **NEW** LIFE AND A VERY **LONG** LIFE WITH MY BODY ASSUMING YOUR CELLULAR CHARACTERISTICS! YOU, MY CAPTIVE VOLUPTUARY, WILL **NOT SURVIVE** THE OPERATION!

I **REGRET** IT HAS TO BE THIS WAY!



CONRAD WAS **RIGHT!** YOU **ARE** MAD! WHEN I GET MY HANDS ON YOU—!

AND AS CONRAD SAID, DEAR GIRL, **THREATS** WILL GET YOU **NOWHERE!**

I HAVE **EVERYTHING** TO GAIN AND **NOTHING** TO LOSE! A RENEWED LIFE NO LIVING WITNESSES TO HAMPER MY WORK! I—!



O-OCTAVIA! FEEL SO **WEAK!** HELP ME TO THE **REGENERATOR!** QUICK—!

THIS IS YOUR **FAULT, PANTHA!** YOU **EXCITED** IMMANUEL WITH YOUR **INSOLENT PRATTING!**

BUT YOU'LL **PAY!**



PAY **HOW?** WILL YOU TAKE A **CHECK?** I LEFT MY CREDIT CARDS IN MY **OTHER SUIT!**

YOU'LL **PAY** WHEN THE SAME **MEMORY HELMET** THAT **RESTORED** YOUR PAST MAKES **ADAM** **FORGET** HIS!*



HE'LL BE MY **PERSONAL PLAYTHING!** I'LL **POSSESS** HIM **BODY** AND **SOUL..** IF NOT IN **MIND!**



AS FOR THE **OLD MAN** AND THE **JAP GIRL**, THEY'LL END UP AS **SPARE PARTS** FOR MY HUSBAND'S NEXT ROUND OF **EXPERIMENTS!**

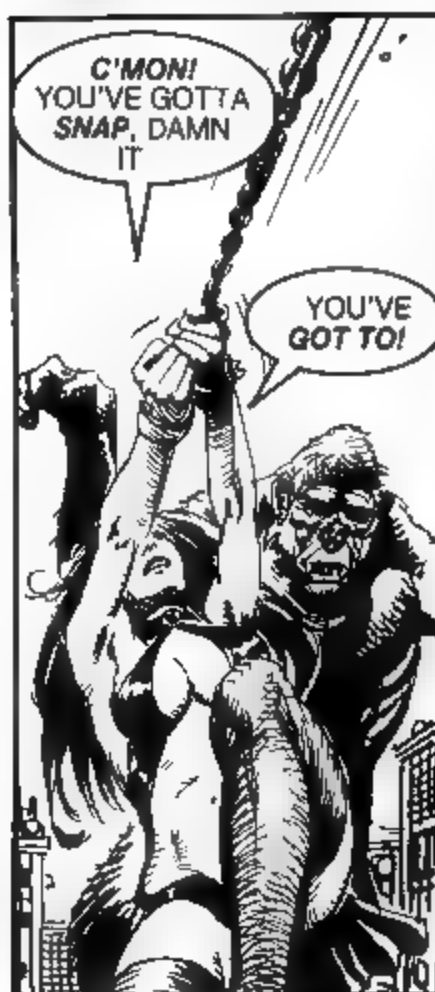
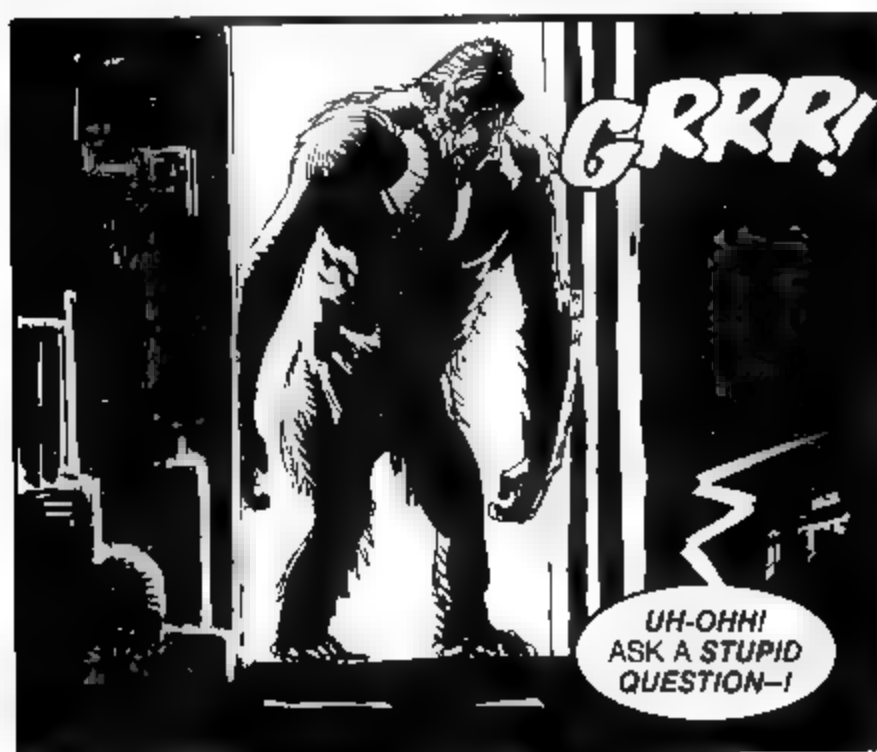
SO, **WHERE'S** YOUR **FLIPPANT TONGUE** NOW EH?



MY **ADAM** TO BE A **MADWOMAN'S LOVE SLAVE...** AND THE REST OF US **SPARE PARTS** FOR THAT **HUMAN JUNK HEAP...?** I CAN'T ALLOW IT!

*SEE VAMPIRELLA #101!





RARRGHGH!



DO YOU MIND
IF I SIT THIS
ONE OUT,
PAL?



I'M A
MUCH BETTER
DANCER ON ALL
FOUR'S ANY-
WAY!

HER TRANSFORMATION INTO THE
FANGED, FELINE SHE-BEAST
COMPLETE PANTHA
WHIRLS TO
FACE HER
MONSTROUS
ADVERSARY!



RARRRR!

H-HE'S SWIFT FOR
HIS SIZE. GRABBED
ME WITH EASE!



WITH A RAGING SNARL,
MANNY FLINGS THE
NIGHTSHADE PANTHER LIKE
A CHILD'S RAGDOLL
ACROSS THE LAB



WHERE SHE SLAMS
INTO A BANK OF
COMPUTERS AMID A
SHOWER OF FIRE-HOT
SPARKS!



UNNH-I
AND I THOUGHT
CATS WERE
SUPPOSED TO
LAND ON THEIR
FEET...!

KKRASH!

IT'S THIS CHAIN
I'M STUCK DRAGGING
AROUND! IT'S SLOWING
ME DOWN THROWING
ME OFF-BALANCE!



LIKE A STREAKING SHADOW, PANTHA EVADES THE APE-MAN AND DARTS OUT THE LAB-DOOR!



PANTHA RACES DOWN THE FIRST DARK CORRIDOR SHE COMES UPON!

IT'S GONNA TAKE TACTICS, SPEED AND STEALTH TO BEAT THAT JUNIOR GRADE SON OF KONG!

GOTTA PUT A LOT OF DISTANCE BETWEEN US TO SET UP AN AMBUSH!



SUDDENLY, THE JUNGLE CAT *REALIZES* HER TACTICAL *MISTAKE!* THE HALLWAY *TERMINATES* IN A WIDE BALCONY, ONE THAT *OVERHANGS* THE OCEAN FAR BELOW!



THERE'S NO ROOM TO MANEUVER AND, WORSE, HERE COMES MANNY RIGHT ON CUE!



ACTION ON *IMPULSE*, PANTHA LEAPS HIGH OVER THE BURLY BRUTE'S HEAD...



WHERE SHE *STRIKES* THE CHATEAU WALL AND INSTANTLY *REBOUNDS* OFF IT!





AND
SLAMMED LIKE A
FREIGHT TRAIN INTO
HIS OPPONENT!



THANK
YOU, MASKED
MANGLER!

BLAAAH!



AS PANTHA RETURNS TO THE STONE-
HEWN LAB AFTER REGAINING HUMAN
FORM, HER FELINE INSTINCTS FLASH IN
SUDDEN ALARM!

STRANGE!
IF I DIDN'T
KNOW BETTER,
I'D SAY I'M
BEING WARNED
OF DANGER!
BUT THAT'S
RIDIC—!

INSTANTLY, THE GURGLING,
GLAZED-EYE DR. RICTUS IS UPON
HER! WITH A VICIOUS SWIPE THE
MADMAN NEARLY SEVERS
PANTHA'S JUGULAR... ONLY HER
LIGHTNING FELINE INSTINCTS SAVE
HER!



RICTUS! HE'S
LOOSE! FORGOT ALL
ABOUT HIM!



JEEZ, THAT
WAS CLOSE! BUT
I CAN HANDLE THIS
DIME STORE GENIUS
WITH OR WITHOUT
MY CLAWS!

KRAK!



IT TAKES BUT SEVERAL SHORT
MINUTES TO AROUSE AND
RELEASE THE FELINE BEAUTY'S
THREE COMPANIONS FROM THEIR
METAL BONDS!

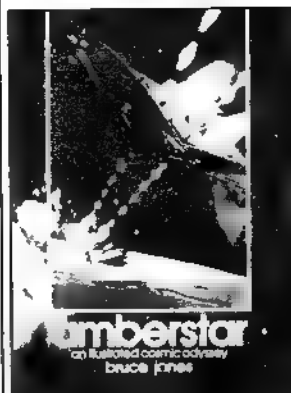
AFTER WE
UNLOAD RICTUS
ON THE POLICE,
DARLING, I'M
FOR HEADING
HOME!

I'LL SECOND
THAT PANTH!
I'VE HAD ENOUGH
WORKING VACATION
TO LAST ME A
LIFETIME!

AMEN TO
THAT, SON
...AMEN
TO THAT!

end

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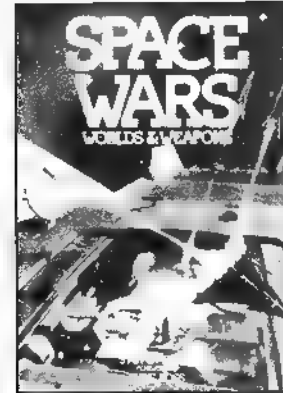
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THE FOX

WILL RAVEN, CAPTAIN OF THE STEAMSHIP PI-LO, AND SHA-MING, NIECE OF THE RUTHLESS WARLORD SHENG KUEI, HAVE DISCOVERED THE PURPOSE OF THEIR MISSION TO SHENS! SHENG KUEI INTENDS TO VIOLATE THE TOMB OF CHINA'S FIRST EMPEROR. CH'IN, AND STEAL HIS TALISMANIC WAND! WITH CH'IN'S WAND, AND THE POWER IT BESTOWS, SHENG HOPES TO RULE ALL OF CHINA... AND CRUSH ITS PEOPLE UNDER HIS HEEL!



IT IS VITAL, W'LL, THAT MY UNCLE NOT BE ALLOWED TO POSSESS THE WAND OF CH'IN SHIH HUANT TI YOU WILL HELP ME TO DESTROY IT?

SURE, PRINCESS! YOUR UNCLE DOESN'T FRIGHTEN ME ONE BIT! DIDN'T I STAND UP TO HIM AND HIS GORILLA, TUNG, BACK THERE ABOARD THE PI-LO?

TERROR IN THE TOMB!



WE'LL HELLO THERE TUNG! KNEW YOU WERE THERE BEHIND US ALL ALONG DID YOU GET A KICK OUT OF THAT 'GORILLA' REMARK? FUNNY, RIGHT?

LET HIM GO! WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM JS?



HE'S NOT TALKING PRINCESS

THINK HE WANTS US TO GO WITH HIM!

AS TUNG **PRODDED** THEM FORWARD, THE **GLITTER** OF THE **COSTUMES**, THE **EXCITED CHATTER** OF THE **MERCHANTS**, AND THE **KALEIDOSCOPE** OF **EXPLODING COLORS** **FADED** ALMOST INSTANTLY, AS IF THEY HAD **SUDDENLY BEEN SUBMERGED** IN A **MURKY SEA**! THIS WAS A PART OF **HANKOW** WHERE MUSIC WAS **NEVER** HEARD, WHERE **SHADOWS** REIGNED, AND WHERE **FRIGHTENED PEOPLE** **HID** BEHIND **BARRICADES** OF **ROTTED WOOD**!



HERE IN A **HOVEL** IN THE **DREGS** OF THE **SLUMS** WAS ONE OF MANY **OPIUM DENS** WHERE THE AIR WAS **HEAVY** WITH THE **PUNGENT STENCH** OF **HOPELESSNESS** AND **BOREDOM**!



YE GODS!

I DID NOT WISH YOU TO SEE THIS!

IT IS BUT ONE OF MANY OF MY **UNCLE'S** **OPERATIONS** WHICH **PREY** ON THE **WEAKNESSES** OF OUR PEOPLE!

CORRECT, MY **DEAR**! AND THOUGH IT CAUSES YOU **SHAME**, YOU HAVE **NEVER** REFUSED THE **RICHES** IT HAS BROUGHT US



MY **WEALTH** HAS ALWAYS BEEN USED TO **AID** MY **PEOPLE**! IF I **RENOUNCED** YOUR **MONEY** YOU WOULD **CONTINUE** YOUR **BUSINESS** AND I WOULD BE **UNABLE** TO **GIVE** MY **PEOPLE** **COMFORT**!

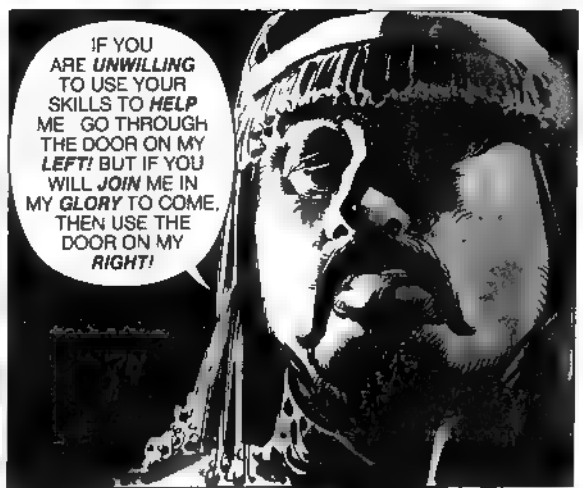
MY **PEOPLE**, YOU SAY, AS IF YOU ARE **TRULY** THE **PRINCESS**! SO BE IT! I WILL **CONSENT** TO **ALLOW** YOU TO **RULE** **CHINA** BY MY **SIDE** AND **AID** YOUR **PEOPLE** IF...!

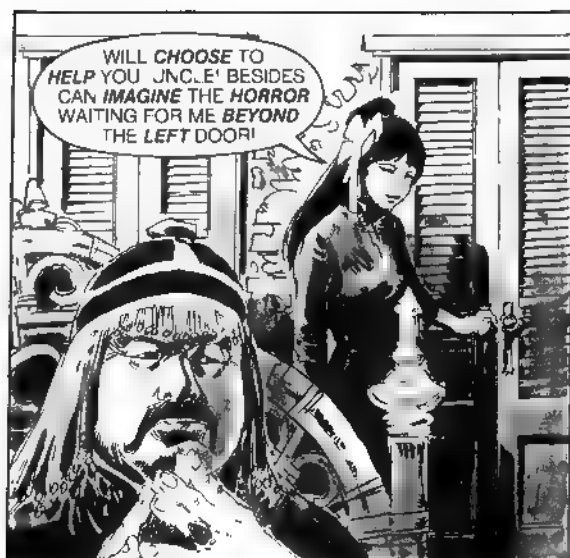


...IF I **DELIVER** YOU TO THE **TOMB** OF **CH'IN SHIH HJANG TI**!

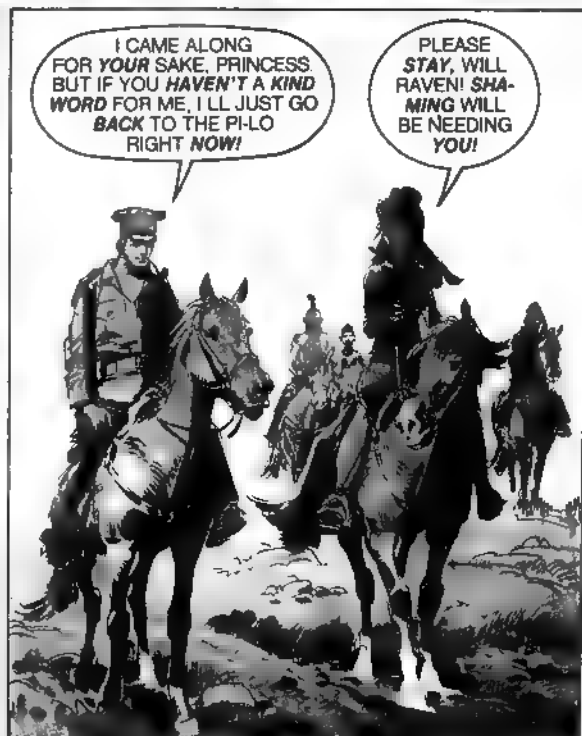
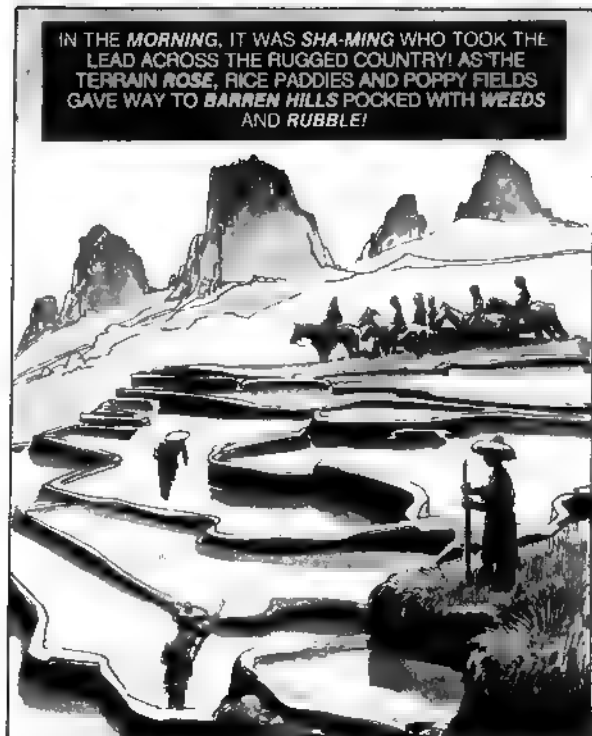
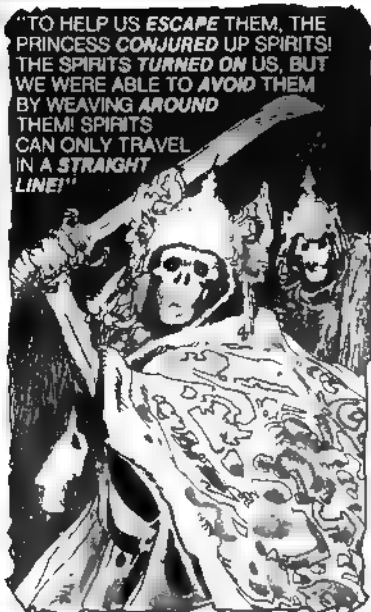
YOU **UNDERSTAND** . BUT YOU ALWAYS **WERE** A **CLEVER** ONE! YOU ARE THE **DIRECT DESCENDANT** OF **MING-TOI**, THE **MOST POWERFUL** OF **SHAMENS**, AND YOU HAVE **INHERITED** HER **STRENGTH** AND **CHARMS**! **THUS** . HAVE A **LITTLE GAME** FOR YOU! **CHOOSE** A **DOOR**!

IF YOU ARE **UNWILLING** TO **USE** YOUR **SKILLS** TO **HELP** ME **GO** THROUGH THE **DOOR** ON MY **LEFT**! BUT IF YOU WILL **JOIN** ME IN MY **GLORY** TO **COME**, THEN **USE** THE **DOOR** ON MY **RIGHT**!











SHA-MING WILL BE NEEDING ME? YOU AREN'T HER, ARE YOU? YOU'RE SOME SORT OF SPIRIT POSSESSING HER BODY!

I SHALL LEAVE HER SOON! PLEASE... CAPTAIN...!



SURE. JUMP SHIP, RAVEN JUST WHEN SHE NEEDS YOU THE MOST!

I SEE THE CAPTAIN HAS CHANGED HIS MIND ABOUT ACCOMPANYING US TO THE TOMB! GOOD! HE HAS SAVED ME THE TROUBLE OF KILLING HIM!

WE ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT KILLING WAS YOUR PRIMARY MEANS OF PLEASURE!



HOURS LATER, THE PARTY ENTERED A MOUNTAIN VALLEY...A FORBIDDEN, LONELY PLACE AS QUIET AS A GRAVE AND SO STILL THAT IT SEEMED EVEN THE WIND DARED NOT VENTURE THERE!

HOW FAR?

THE CATACOMBS ARE JUST AHEAD!



THE MINUTE THE WARY EXPLORERS LEFT THEIR HORSES BEHIND AND STEPPED INTO THE CATACOMBS, THE DARK AND CHILL CLOSED OVER THEM...AND THEIR EVERY STEP WAS ECHOED BY THE IMPERVIOUS CAVERNS!



WE'VE BEEN WALKING FOR HOURS! IF THIS IS A TRICK OF YOURS...!

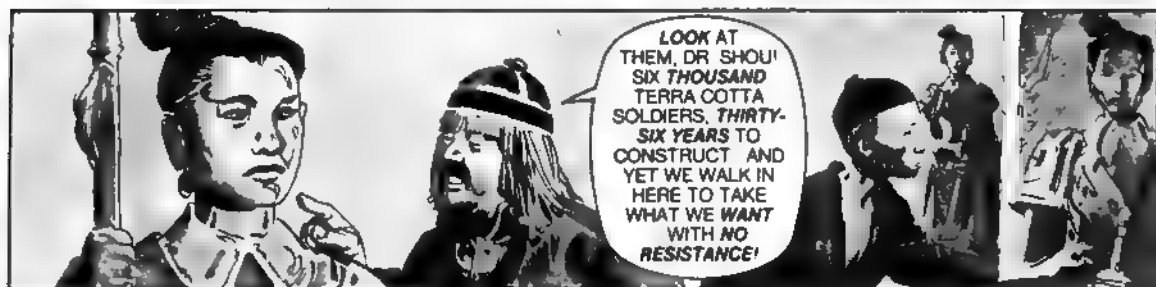
PATIENCE UNCLE LOOK UP AHEAD!



IT IS CHIA, GUARDIAN OF THE EAST, DESTROYER OF EVIL!

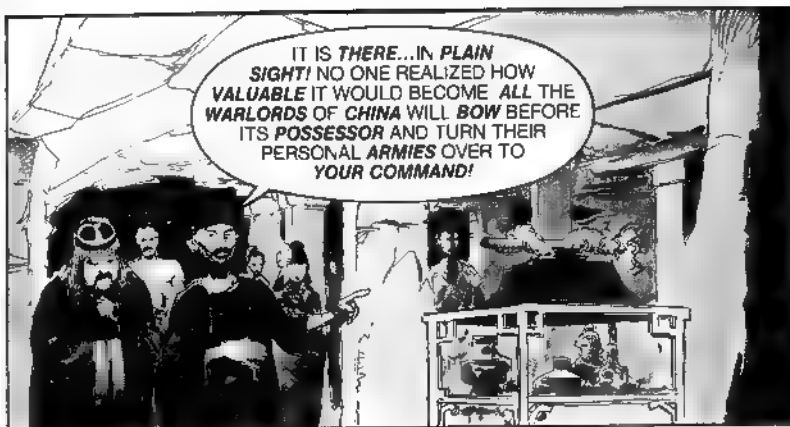
FAH!

THE GLOOM OF THE CATACOMBS WAS SUDDENLY LIFTED AS THE PARTY CAME UPON THE SPLENDOR OF THE TOMB OF CH'IN! THE COFFIN GLISTENED IN ITS CRADLE, AND THE MYRIAD TERRA COTTA SOLDIERS STOOD IN MUTE WITNESS TO THE TOMB'S AWESOME MAJESTY!

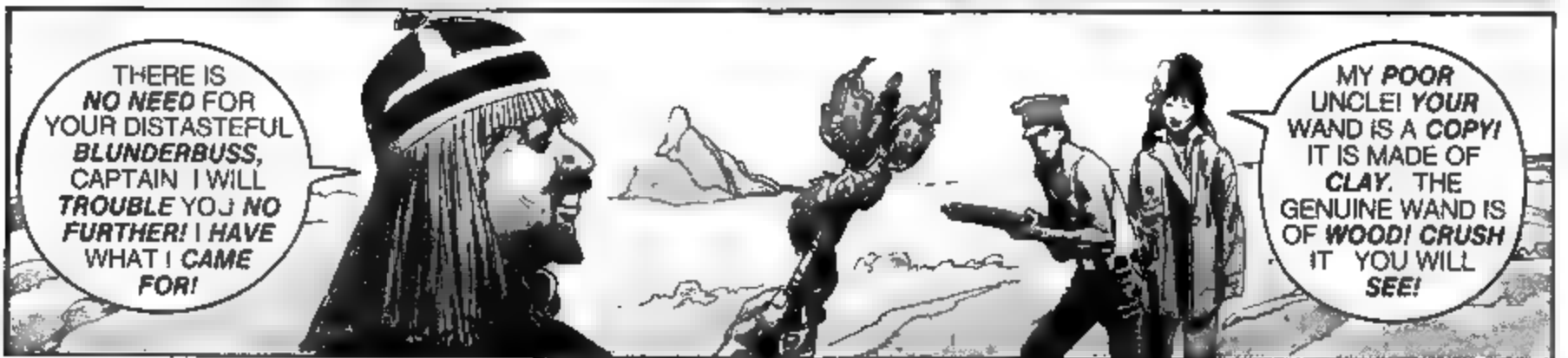


THWONG!









FOR AS LONG AS MEN CAN REMEMBER, THE TWO KINGDOMS HAVE SHARED A BORDER AND MAINTAINED AN UNEASY TRUCE: THORNODDIUM, A SOCIETY OF LAWS, MERCANTILISM, AND MILITARISM, SEEKING TO OPEN HER MARKETS TO TRADE ACROSS THE SEAS...AND SAPPHAE, A MYSTERIOUS TRIBAL SOCIETY, ALSO MILITARISTIC...FIERCELY SO...BUT CLOSED TO MEN AND THE EYES OF THE WORLD!

ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO RECONCILE THE DIFFERENCES OF THE TWO LANDS...BUT IT IS TOO LATE FOR DIPLOMACY NOW! THE THORNOD ARMY HAS COME IN FORCE TO THE LAND OF THE AMAZONS...TO TAKE WHAT HAS BEEN DENIED THEM!

AS THE ARMY CROSSES THE RAVINE THAT REPRESENTS THE BORDER, A STRIKINGLY BEAUTIFUL YET DETERMINED FIGHTRESS BREAKS FROM HER COVER AND BLOCKS THEIR WAY!




COLUMN
HALT! ARMS AT
THE READY!

WOMAN, CONVEY THIS MESSAGE TO YOUR QUEEN: WE THORNODS HAVE TRIED BY PEACEFUL MEANS TO SECURE RIGHT OF PASSAGE THROUGH YOUR VALLEY TO THE RIVER, YET YOUR QUEEN HAS REFUSED! NOW WE COME TO TAKE THE VALLEY ITSELF!

I WILL CONVEY NO MESSAGE, STUPID MANLING! FOR I AM NO EMISSARY! I AM SHE WHO REIGNS...PENTESILEA, QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS!


AND I COMMAND YOU TO TURN YOUR ARMY ABOUT AND RETURN TO YOUR SWEAT-LODGES!





I HAVE WATCHED
YOUR THORNOD CITIES
SPRAWL ACROSS THE
PLAINS, YOUR FIELDS
GROW WIDER, YOUR
TEMPLES TALLER, YOUR
MERCHANTS BOLDER TO
CROSS OUR VALLEY TO
THE RIVER! I KNEW
THIS DAY WOULD
COME!

WE NEED
ACCESS TO THE
RIVER TO BETTER
TRADE WITH ROME,
MESOPATAMIA, AND
THE AFRICAS!



WE SENT YOU
AN EMISSARY A YEAR
PAST...A MAN CAME
IN PEACE, TO TRY TO
SOFTEN YOUR HEART
AGAINST MEN. AN
EMISSARY OF LOVE,
SO TO SAY!

LOVE...HA! YOUR LOVE
EMISSARY FAILED, AS ALL MEN WILL
WHO TRY TO PLEASE A WOMAN!

AND YET, EVEN
SOME OF YOUR OWN PEOPLE
HAVE SAID THAT QUEEN
PENTHESILEA FOUND HERSELF
LOVING THE MAN TOO WELL!
YOU TURNED HIM OUT, LEST
YOU LOSE YOUR PEOPLE'S
ESTEEM...AND YOUR HATRED
OF MEN!

A LIE! ALL I LEARNED
FROM THAT ONE WAS THAT TO
JOIN WITH MEN IS TO WAIT,
TO OBEY, TO SERVE! AND
AMAZONS SERVE NO ONE!
HEAR ME! NO ONE!

AND SO YOU
WILL SEE YOUR PEOPLE
SLAUGHTERED TO PROVE
YOUR POINT! AT LEAST
CONSENT TO FIGHT
CHAMPIONS...ONE
AGAINST ONE...SO AS
TO AVOID THE DEATH OF
YOUR NATION! HOW DO
YOU ANSWER?



ATTACK, SHE-
WARRIORS! DRIVE OUT
THE INVADERS!



AT THE FIRST JOINING OF THE LINES, THE THORNOD
FOOTSOLDIERS ARE SHY OF STRIKING WOMEN WITH COLD,
KILLING STEEL! AND IN THOSE MOMENTS, THE AMAZONS
PRESS THE ADVANTAGE, CUTTING THEM DOWN WITHOUT
MERCY!



SEE THEM
COWER BEFORE OUR
MIGHT! DRIVE THEM
OUT, FIGHTRESSES!
NEVER WILL THEY
ENTER OUR VALLEY
AGAIN!



GOD'S THONG! THE
WOMEN ARE POSSESSED!
ATTACK THEM, MEN!
KILL THE QUEEN!

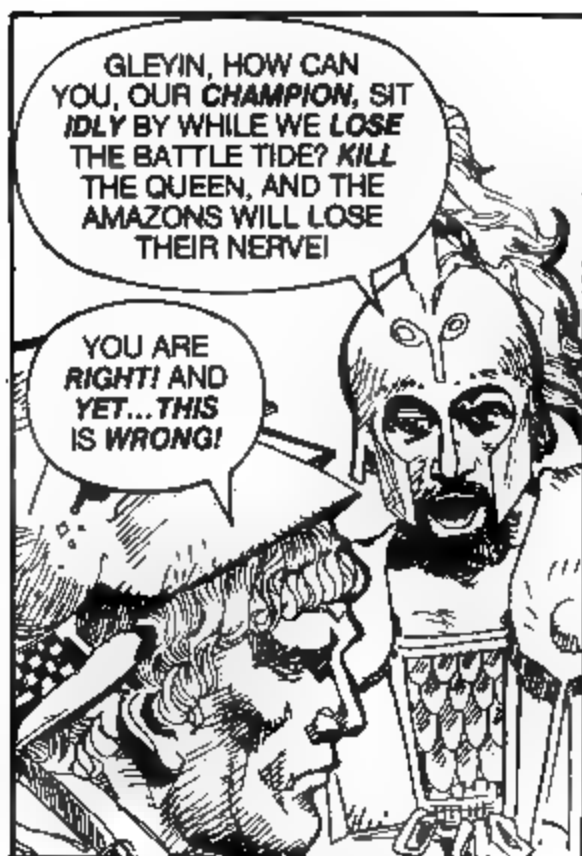


THE THORNODS SEND
THEIR BEST AGAINST
PENTESILEA, BUT SHE
STRIKES THEM DOWN
ONE AFTER THE
OTHER!



THAT
FOR YOUR
ARROGANCE,
THORNODI THAT
FOR YOUR GREED!
AND THAT FOR
THE SAKE OF YOUR
OWN WOMAN, WHO
IS BETTER OFF
A WIDOW!





WEARILY, RESIGNEDLY, THE ONE CALLED GLEYIN DONS HIS ARMOR AND STRIDES ONTO THE FIELD OF BATTLE!



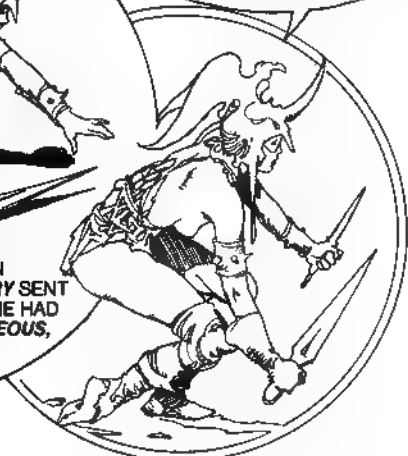



YET, EVEN AS SHE SPEAKS THESE WORDS...

WE LOVED ONCE, GLEYIN, BUT THAT IS THE PAST! NOW YOU ARE AN INVADER AND MUST RETREAT...OR DIE!




PENTESILEA KNOWS THEY ARE LIES! GLEYIN HAD BEEN THE LOVE EMISSARY SENT TO JOIN THEIR KINGDOMS! HE HAD BEEN RESPECTFUL, COURTEOUS, GALLANT...AND TENDER!





AS PENTESILEA ATTACKS,
THE ARMIES GATHER TO
WATCH...AND WAIT FOR THE
OUTCOME! GLEYIN'S HEART
FALLS.. THE DUEL OF
CHAMPIONS IS *INEVITABLE!*

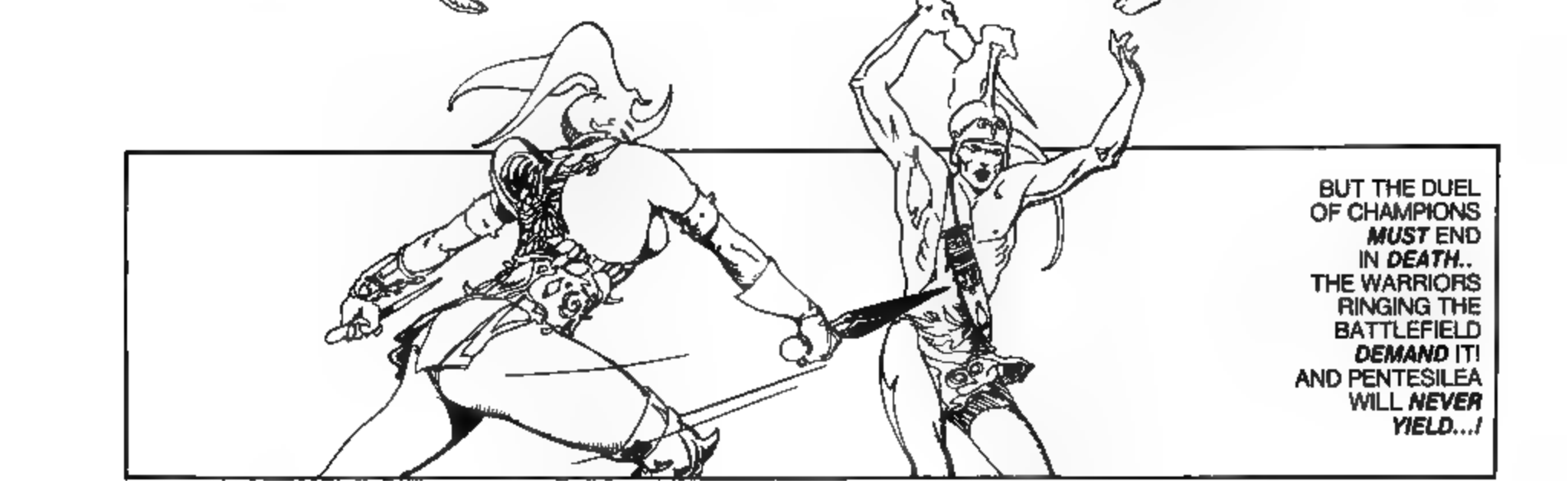


HE SEES NOW THAT THE
VENOM THAT **POISONS**
PENTELISEA'S **HEART** IS
NOT MERELY A
WOMAN'S HATRED FOR
ALL MEN! NO,
PENTESILEA IS **FIRST A**
WOMAN... AND **KNOWS**
HOW TO **LOVE!**

THE HATRED THAT
CORRUPTS HER IS THAT OF
A **RULER** WHO REFUSES TO
BE **DOMINATED!** IT IS THE
PRIDE THAT INFECTS ALL
MEN. AND WOMEN OF
POWER!



GLEYIN CANNOT
FIND IT IN HIM
TO **STRIKE** HER!
HE **EVADES** HER
FEROCIOUS
ATTACKS
AS **BEST**
HE **CAN!**



BUT THE DUEL
OF CHAMPIONS
MUST END
IN **DEATH..**
THE WARRIORS
RINGING THE
BATTLEFIELD
DEMAND IT!
AND PENTESILEA
WILL **NEVER**
YIELD...!

GLEVIN'S THRUST IS TRUE! PENTISILEA DIES ALMOST INSTANTLY! HER PAIN, THOUGH EXCRUCIATING, IS BRIEF...AND THERE IS NO TIME FOR HER TO WONDER WHAT WILL BECOME OF HER PEOPLE!



THE CHAMPION OF THE INVADING THORNOODS HAS ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD TO FEEL HIS PAIN, AND TO REMEMBER THE SIGHT OF LOVELY PENTISILEA THRASHING IN THE GROWING POOL OF HER RICH RED BLOOD!

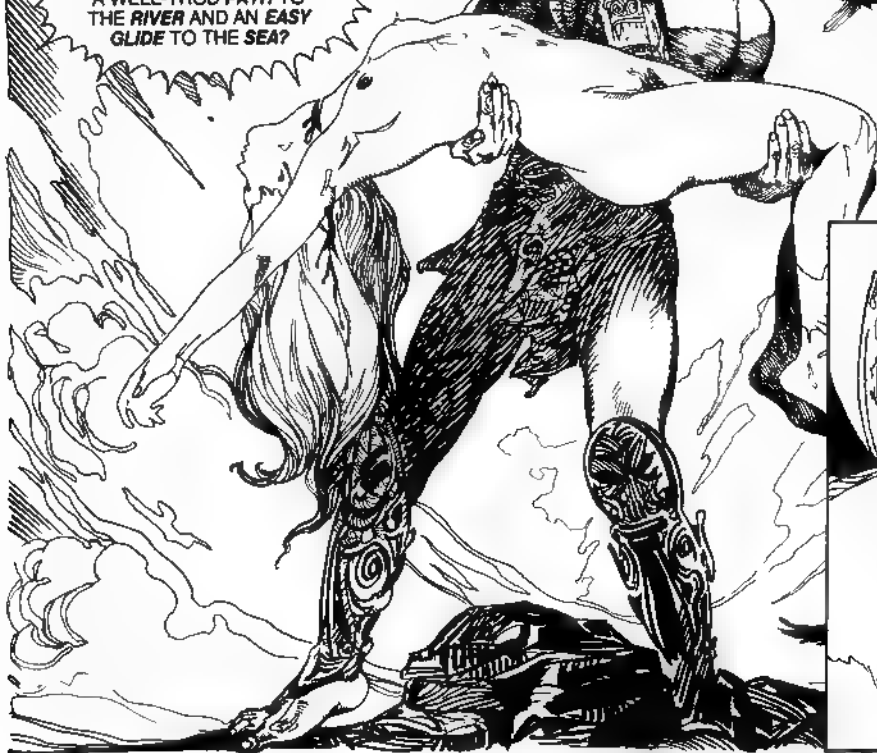


IS IT NOT ENOUGH FOR THE GLOATING GODS OF WAR THAT STRANGERS KILL STRANGERS? MUST THOSE WHO ONCE LOVED, KILL EACH OTHER AS WELL?

AND WHY? SO THAT GREASEY MERCHANTS AND LAZY PRELATES MAY HAVE A WELL-TROD PATH TO THE RIVER AND AN EASY GLIDE TO THE SEA?

I RENOUNCE MY STATION AS CHAMPION AND THIS LIFE OF KILLING...AND I DAMN YOU ALL...!

FAREWELL, PROUD WOMAN! MAY YOUR SPIRIT ASCEND TO THE GODDESS...YET REMAIN IN THE HEARTS OF YOUR PEOPLE!



end

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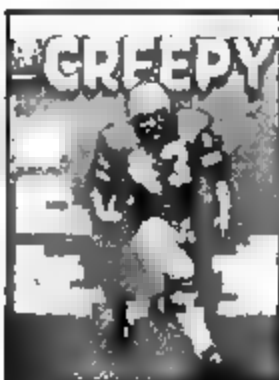
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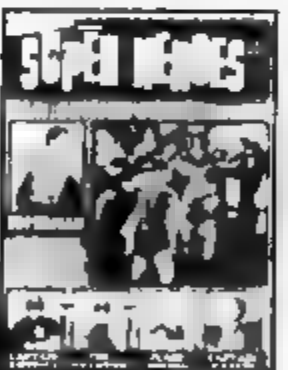
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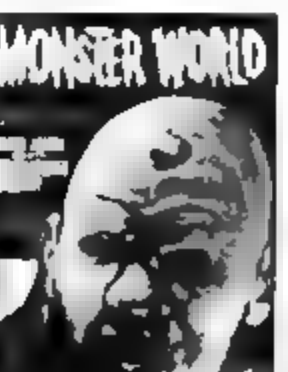
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prologue

CAPTAIN RHEA O'KEEFE LIT A CIGARETTE AND LISTENED CLOSELY FOR ANY SOUND FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CONTROL ROOM HATCH...THERE WAS NONE! BUT SHE KNEW THAT IT WAS OUT THERE...
WAITING!



INTERSTELLAR FREIGHTER "AMERANTH"

CREW: FIVE.
CARGO: TROPICAL PLANTS AND
SEEDLINGS, PLANET XERES.
DESTINATION: THE LEPANTO
COLONY/SECOND QUADRANTAL
DIVISION.
TIME IN TRANSIT: 16 WEEKS/3 DAYS.
TIME OF ARRIVAL: UNKNOWN.



O'KEEFE WANTED TO FINISH HER SHIP'S LOG...SHE WANTED TO MAKE SOME **FINAL REMARKS** FOR POSTERITY...BUT IT WAS DIFFICULT TO CONCENTRATE WITH **IT**...WITH **HIM** LURKING JUST OUTSIDE THE HATCH!



BUT **SOMEONE** MUST KNOW THE **TRUTH** OF THE AMERANTH...AND SO SHE BEGAN: "WHAT FOLLOWS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A MATTER OF RECORD. AS FAR AS I CAN DETERMINE, CREWMEMBERS CAFLIN, STEWART, MOSS AND JANSEN ARE ALL DEAD! I ALONE REMAIN!"

"IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO **EXPLAIN** THE EVENTS OF THE **PAST FEW HOURS** WITHOUT FIRST RECALLING THE EVENTS OF THE **LAST FOUR MONTHS...**"

O'KEEFE PAUSED TO
POUR HERSELF A STIFF
DRINK INTO CAFLIN'S
BATTERED OLD
COFFEE CUP! THE
WHIRRING AND
CLICKING OF THE
COMPUTER CONTROLS
ONLY SERVED TO
REINFORCE THE
LONELINESS OF A
GHOST SHIP IN THE
VAST EXPANSE OF INKY
BLACK SPACE! SHE
SHOOK HERSELF OUT
OF HER REVERIE AND
PERUSED HER SHIP'S
LOG...



"29/APRIL/58 - XERES. THE
CREW HAS FINAL LIBERTY
WHILE CAFLIN AND I REMAIN
ABOARD TO CHECK THE
SHIP'S MANIFEST! THE
COOLANT MALFUNCTIONS
ARE AN EVER PRESENT
PROBLEM AND I HAVE
SCHEDULED AN OVERHAUL
UPON OUR ARRIVAL AT
LEPANTO."

"OUR PORT/T.R. ROBOT OUT
OF SERVICE SINCE 16/APRIL
IS REPLACED WITH A 75 YEAR
OLD MORLEY SERIES KL4.
THE MORLEY IS PRIMITIVELY
PROGRAMMED AND RATHER
SPOOKY-LOOKING. THE
CREW HAS NICKNAMED
HIM...LOVER!"



LOVER

"THE LARGE MORLEY SEEMS TO BE
IN GOOD CONDITION DESPITE ITS
AGE. IT LOADS ALL FOUR BAYS IN
RECORD TIME! CREW RETURNS. WE
DEPART XERES."

"13/MAY/56. NEARLY **CONSTANT** COOLANT **MALFUNCTION**. CABIN TEMPERATURE HOLDS AT 88 DEGREES. HUMIDITY **HIGH**. CARGO CONDITION **EXCELLENT**."



"CREW. **HOT AND IRASCIBLE!** OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS '**LOVER**' HAS BECOME THE OBJECT OF **TORMENT** AND **ABUSE!** I **OBSERVE** BUT DO NOT **INTERFERE** IN THE HOPE THAT THIS PHASE WILL **PASS!**"

"19/MAY/56. THE **ABUSE** OF THE **ROBOT** **CONTINUES** ENDLESSLY! **MORALE** IS **BAD**, BUT AGAINST MY BETTER JUDGEMENT I **ORDER** THAT ALL **HARASSMENT** OF THE **MORLEY** **CEASE!**"



"23/MAY/56. **HATRED** **FESTERS** ABOARD THE **AMERANTH!** I **SUSPECT** THAT BEHIND MY BACK, THE CREW **RIDICULES** ME, AND **CONTINUE** THEIR **MALTREATMENT** OF THE **MORLEY!**"

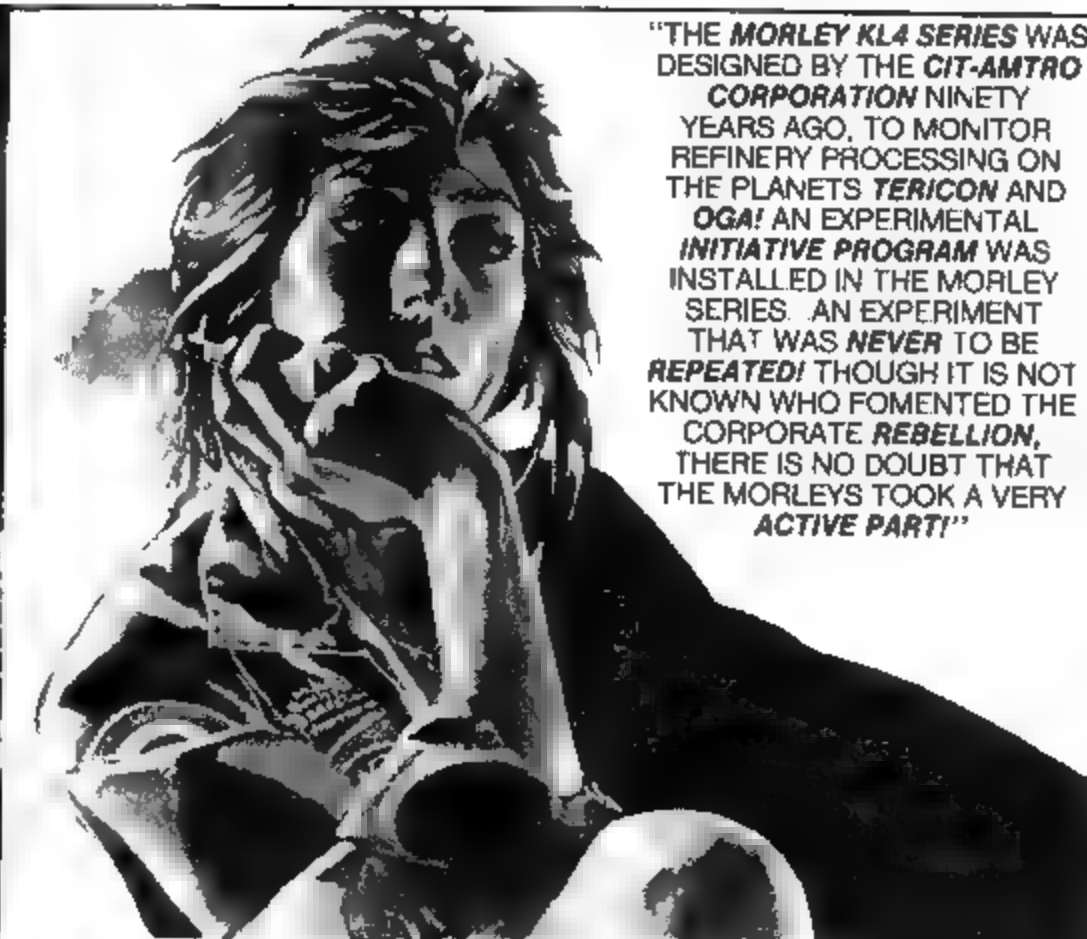


"**PERSONAL NOTE:** SOMETHING **INSIDE** ME IS **MOVED** BY THE **MORLEY!** THOUGH IT IS **ONLY** **STEEL** AND **CIRCUITRY**, I **SENSE** AN **UNSPEAKABLE** **SADNESS!** I AM **COMPELLED** TO **LEARN** MORE OF THE **MACHINE'S** **HISTORY!**"

"24/MAY/56. MY PERUSAL OF THE MORLEY'S MAINTENANCE TAPES HAS FILLED ME WITH DREAD AND FOREBODING!"



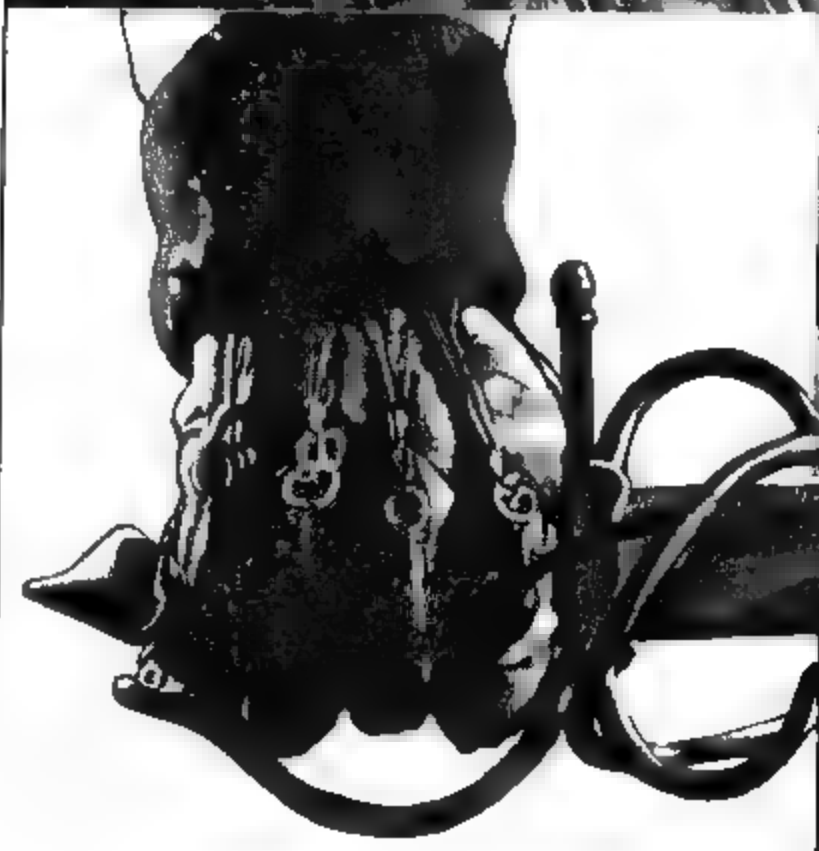
"THE MORLEY KL4 SERIES WAS DESIGNED BY THE CIT-AMTRO CORPORATION NINETY YEARS AGO, TO MONITOR REFINERY PROCESSING ON THE PLANETS *TERICON* AND *OGA!* AN EXPERIMENTAL INITIATIVE PROGRAM WAS INSTALLED IN THE MORLEY SERIES. AN EXPERIMENT THAT WAS *NEVER* TO BE REPEATED! THOUGH IT IS NOT KNOWN WHO FOMENTED THE CORPORATE *REBELLION*, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE MORLEYS TOOK A VERY ACTIVE PART!"



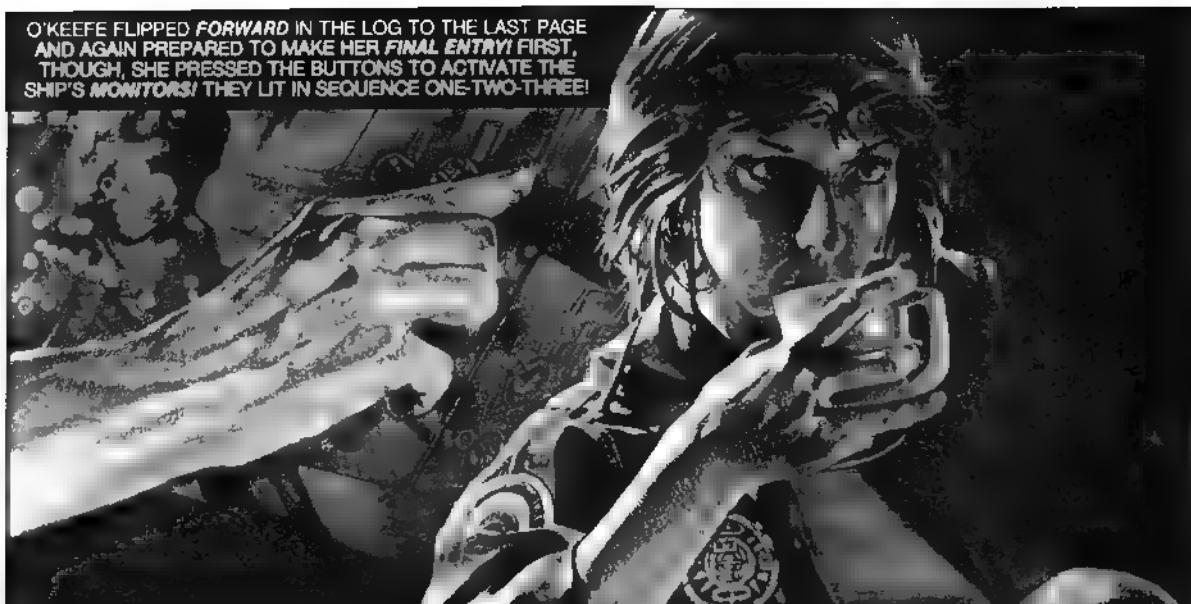
"IN DEFIANCE OF THE LONG-STANDING ASIMOVIAN MYTH, THE MORLEYS TOOK SENTIENT LIFE WITH SKILL AND INGENUITY! THE WAR WAS A LONG AND BLOODY ONE!"



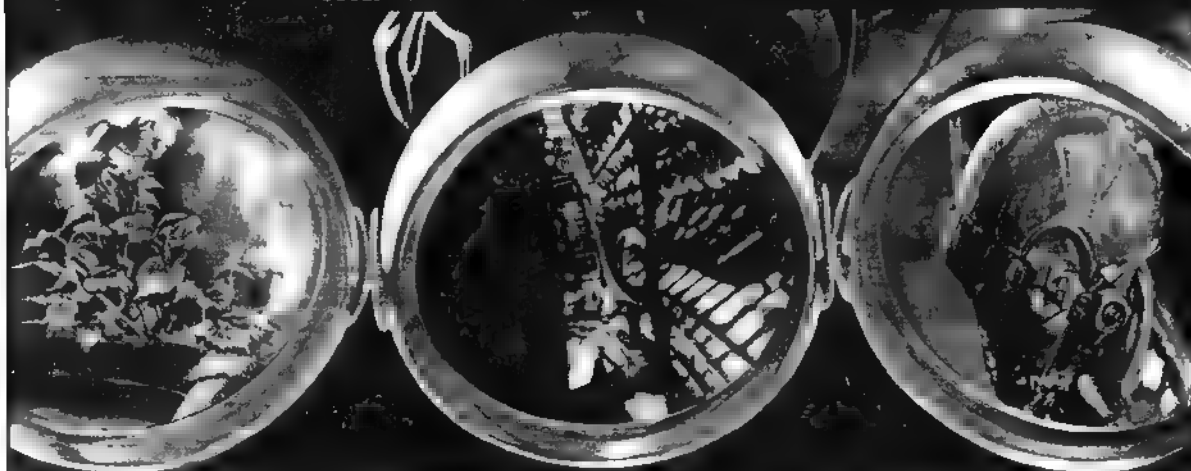
"'LOVER' HAD SEEN ACTION ON BOTH COLONIES! WITH THE END OF THE WAR AND THE DISSOLUTION OF CIT-AMTRO, THE MORLEYS WERE SOLD! SOME WERE SCRAPPED, OTHERS WERE REPROGRAMMED AS PORT/T.R.'S AND RELOCATED TO OBSCURE PORTS! NO ONE KNOWS HOW MANY REMAIN! NO ONE KNOWS IF THE INITIATIVE PROGRAM WAS TAMPERED WITH IN REPROGRAMMING!"



O'KEEFE FLIPPED FORWARD IN THE LOG TO THE LAST PAGE AND AGAIN PREPARED TO MAKE HER FINAL ENTRY! FIRST, THOUGH, SHE PRESSED THE BUTTONS TO ACTIVATE THE SHIP'S MONITORS! THEY LIT IN SEQUENCE ONE-TWO-THREE!

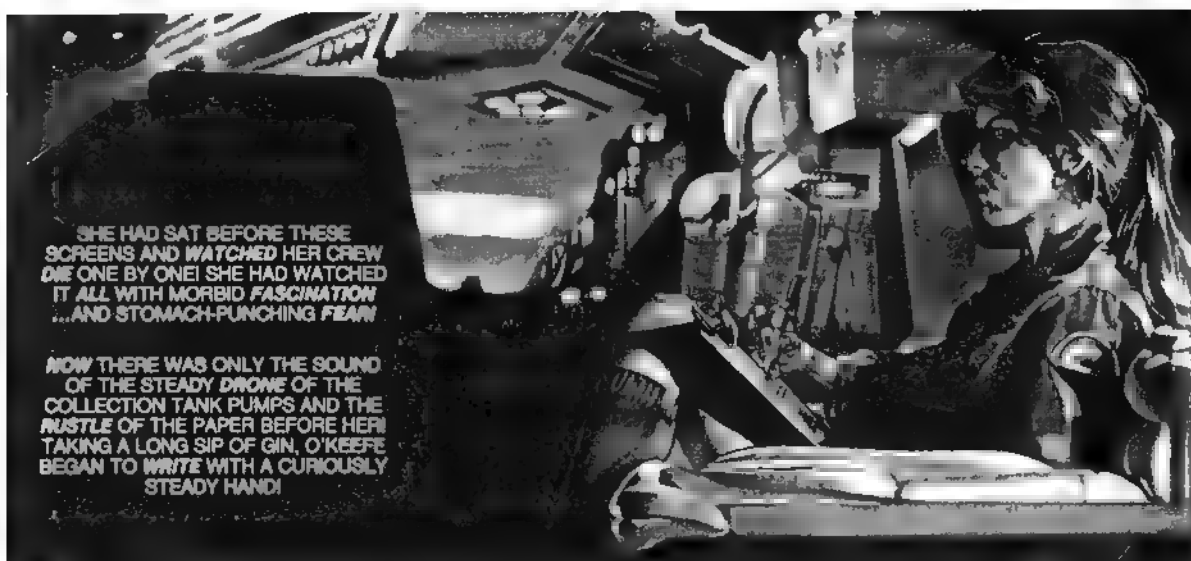


COLLECTION TANKS/GREENHOUSE...BAY/RECREATION...ENGINEERING/CORRIDOR...ALL REMAINED AS THEY HAD BEEN THE LAST TWO HOURS! 'LOVER' STOOD MOTIONLESS IN THE THIRD SCREEN! O'KEEFE LEFT THE FOURTH SCREEN DARK, FOR SHE COULD NO LONGER LOOK ON THE CORPSE OF A FRIEND!



SHE HAD SAT BEFORE THESE SCREENS AND WATCHED HER CREW DIE ONE BY ONE! SHE HAD WATCHED IT ALL WITH MORBID FASCINATION...AND STOMACH-PUNCHING FEAR!

NOW THERE WAS ONLY THE SOUND OF THE STEADY DRONE OF THE COLLECTION TANK PUMPS AND THE RUSTLE OF THE PAPER BEFORE HER! TAKING A LONG SIP OF GIN, O'KEEFE BEGAN TO WRITE WITH A CURIOUSLY STEADY HAND!



"5/AUG./56. EARLIER TODAY THIS CRAFT WAS STRUCK AND PARTIALLY DISABLED BY WHAT WE ASSUME WAS A SMALL, SUB-SPACE METEORITE! DAMAGE WAS RESTRICTED TO THE FORWARD COLLECTION TANK AREA. INSTRUMENTS SHOW A METERED LOSS OF LIQUID HELIUM. THE INTER-CABIN DOORS LOCKED UPON IMPACT AS OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES DICTATED, BUT FAILURE OF ONE OR MORE ELECTRICAL CIRCUITS PREVENTED MANUAL OVERRIDE. THE JAMMED HATCHES ISOLATED THE CREW IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE SHIP."

"MOSS AND STEWART IN THE DAMAGED TANK AREA..."

"...JANSEN IN QUARTERS..."

"...AND CAFLIN IN THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE WHERE I AM CONFINED."



"I IMMEDIATELY ISSUED ORDERS FOR REPAIR!"



MOSS, YOU AND STEWART GET ME A REPORT ON CARGO STATUS AND ANY DAMAGE TO THE TANKS!



JANSEN, DIG OUT YOUR SPACE SUIT, BABE! I WANT AN OUTSIDE VISUAL REPORT AS SOON AS CAFLIN HAS THE DOORS OPERATIONAL! CAFLIN—!

I KNOW THE DOORS! BUT IT'S GONNA TAKE TIME! THERE'S A HELL OF A LOT OF ELECTRICAL DAMAGE!



MOSS, I TOLD YOU I WANT A CARGO STATUS REPORT NOW GET ON IT!



SURE, SURE! SPEAKIN' OF ELECTRICAL DAMAGE, YOUR BOY FRIEND HERE GOT BOUNCED AROUND GOOD! HE DON'T RESPOND TO COMMAND AND HE SMELLS LIKE A BUCKET O'BLOWN FUSES! "SHEW!"



"I TURNED MY ATTENTION TO THE ELECTRICAL SCHEMATICS. WHILE MOSS FOLLOWED HER ORDERS WITH TYPICAL DILIGENCE!"

WELL, LOVER IT LOOKS LIKE YER LADY DON'T CARE ABOUT YA NO MORE! DON'T YOU WORRY THOUGH, A LOOKER LIKE YOU WON'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE FINDIN' A NEW GIRL! HERE, LET ME DRESS YA UP!

NOW YA LOOK SO PRETTY IT'S ALMOST A SHAME WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO JUNK YA! DID YA HEAR ME? JUNK!

OH MY GOD!



"WHEN SHE SNAPPED OUT OF HER FEAR-BRED PARALYSIS, STEWART TRIED TO HELP MOSS! SHE ATTACKED THE ROBOT WITH A CRATING BAR..."

"STEWART'S SCREAMS BROUGHT US ALL BACK TO THE MONITORS IN TIME TO SEE MOSS ALIVE FOR THE LAST TIME!"



"... BUT IT DID LITTLE MORE THAN ATTRACT HIS ATTENTION!"

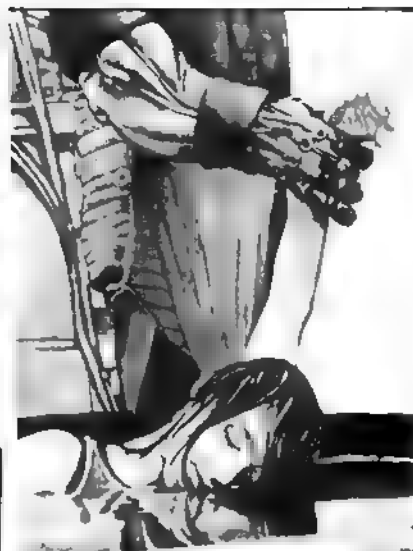


"'LOVER' LIFTED STEWART OFF THE FLOOR WITH ONE HAND! TOO FRIGHTENED TO STRUGGLE, STEWART HUNG IN THE AIR, TRANSFIXED!"



"'LOVER' BROUGHT UP HIS OTHER HAND WITH STUDIED PRECISION, CLAMPED IT ON TOP OF STEWART'S HEAD...AND TWISTED, THE WAY ONE MIGHT OPEN A STUBBORN JAW THERE WAS NO SCREAM, ONLY THE SNAP OF BROKEN BONES!"

"LEAVING STEWART AND MOSS LOLLING IN THE TANKS LIKE BROKEN TOYS, 'LOVER' SHUFFLED SLOWLY THROUGH THE FORWARD GREENHOUSE!"



"JANSEN HAD WITNESSED THE HORRID SCENE IN THE MONITOR, AS I HAD! NOW SHE LIFTED HER EYES TO MINE AS SHE SCRATCHED FUTILELY AT THE HATCH!"

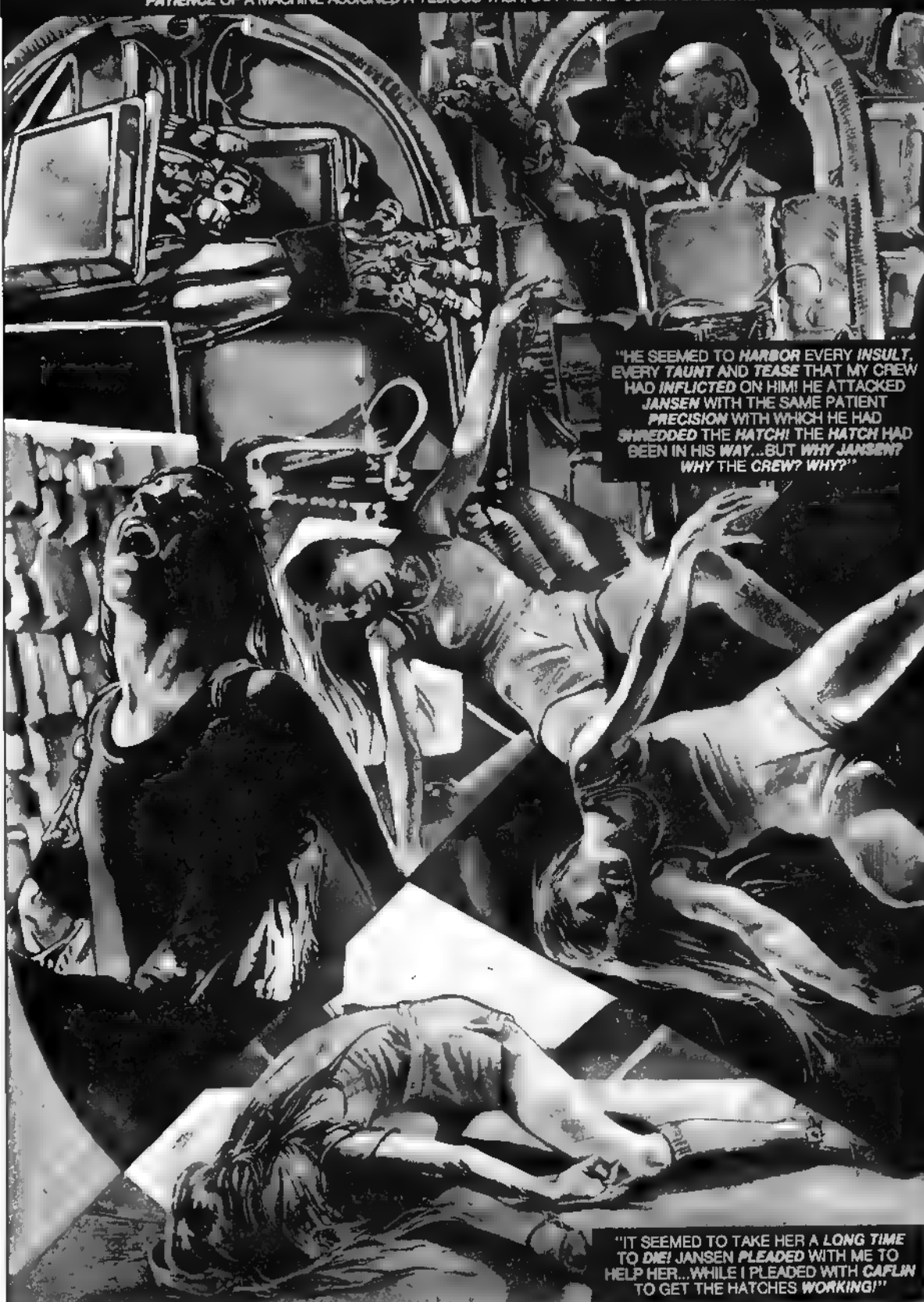


JESUS OH
SWEET JESUS! HE'S
COMING THIS WAY!
ARE THE HATCHES
STILL JAMMED? CAN
ANYONE HEAR ME?
HELP! OH PLEASE
HELP ME!



"'LOVER' PAUSED AT THE HATCH AND PRESSED HIS WEIGHT AGAINST IT...! THE DOOR HELD!"

"BUT EVEN THE THICK MEGA-ALLOY PLATE COULD NOT WITHSTAND THE INEXORABLE PUNCHING! 'LOVER' HAD THE DULL PATIENCE OF A MACHINE ASSIGNED A TEDIOUS TASK, BUT HE HAD SOMETHING MORE..."



"HE SEEMED TO HARBOR EVERY INSULT, EVERY TAUNT AND TEASE THAT MY CREW HAD INFLICTED ON HIM! HE ATTACKED JANSEN WITH THE SAME PATIENT PRECISION WITH WHICH HE HAD SHREDDED THE HATCH! THE HATCH HAD BEEN IN HIS WAY...BUT WHY JANSEN? WHY THE CREW? WHY?"

"IT SEEMED TO TAKE HER A LONG TIME TO DIE! JANSEN PLEADED WITH ME TO HELP HER...WHILE I PLEADED WITH CAFLIN TO GET THE HATCHES WORKING!"

"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO SAY WHAT WAS GOING THROUGH CAFLIN'S MIND AS SHE WATCHED 'LOVER'S' RAMPAGE. IT MAY HAVE BEEN SHOCK OR SOME IRRATIONAL NEED FOR REVENGE..."

"...BUT FOR WHATEVER REASON, SHE SAID NOTHING WHEN THE DOORS WERE AGAIN OPERATIVE!"



"INSTEAD SHE ELECTED TO DESTROY THE ROBOT PERSONALLY, WITH THE AID OF ONE OF THE SHIP'S WELDING GUNS!"

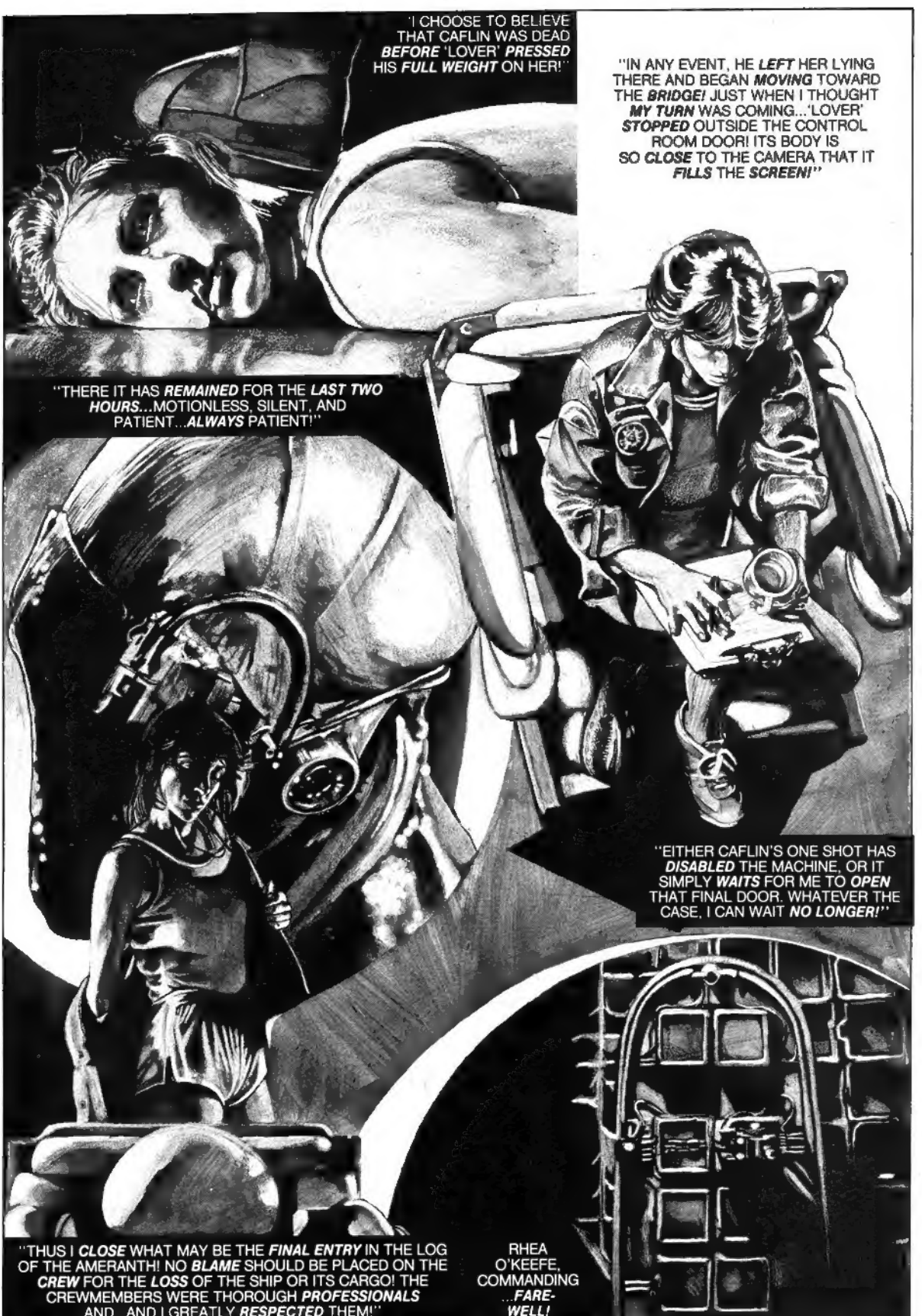


"SHE MISSED 'LOVER'S' HEAD BY A GOOD TEN INCHES!"



"CAFLIN HAD WASTED THE ENTIRE CHARGE IN HER FIRST SHOT! BY THE TIME SHE REALIZED THAT FATAL MISTAKE, THE SILENT, CIRCUITED GOLEM WAS UPON HER!"





"I CHOOSE TO BELIEVE
THAT CAFLIN WAS DEAD
BEFORE 'LOVER' PRESSED
HIS **FULL WEIGHT** ON HER!"

"IN ANY EVENT, HE **LEFT** HER LYING
THERE AND BEGAN **MOVING** TOWARD
THE **BRIDGE**! JUST WHEN I THOUGHT
MY TURN WAS COMING... 'LOVER'
STOPPED OUTSIDE THE CONTROL
ROOM DOOR! ITS BODY IS
SO **CLOSE** TO THE CAMERA THAT IT
FILLS THE SCREEN!"

"THERE IT HAS **REMAINED** FOR THE **LAST TWO**
HOURS...MOTIONLESS, SILENT, AND
PATIENT...**ALWAYS PATIENT!**"

"EITHER CAFLIN'S ONE SHOT HAS
DISABLED THE MACHINE, OR IT
SIMPLY **WAITS** FOR ME TO **OPEN**
THAT FINAL DOOR. WHATEVER THE
CASE, I CAN WAIT **NO LONGER!**"

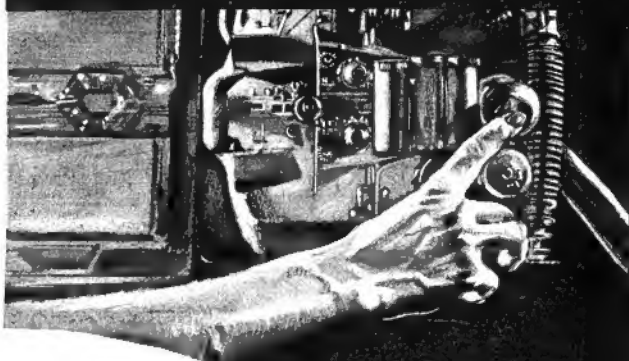
"THUS I **CLOSE** WHAT MAY BE THE **FINAL ENTRY** IN THE LOG
OF THE AMERANTH! NO **BLAME** SHOULD BE PLACED ON THE
CREW FOR THE **LOSS** OF THE SHIP OR ITS CARGO! THE
CREWMEMBERS WERE THOROUGH **PROFESSIONALS**
AND... AND I GREATLY **RESPECTED** THEM!"

RHEA
O'KEEFE,
COMMANDING
...FARE-
WELL!

"FAREWELL"...THE WORD ECHOED HOLLOWLY IN O'KEEFE'S MIND AS SHE HESITATED BEFORE THE HATCH!



THE HATCH OPENED WITH AN HYDRAULIC HISS! THERE WAS THE SMELL OF BURNT INSULATION AND THE THICKER SMELL OF BLOOD!"



OUT OF THE DARKNESS, 'LOVER' CLUMPED TOWARD O'KEEFE AND SHE STOOD HER GROUND WITH A SHARP INTAKE OF PRECIOUS BREATH! FOR A MOMENT, WOMAN AND MACHINE STOOD FROZEN!



'LOVER LIFTED HIS MASSIVE ARM! AS SHE GAZED UPON HIS OFFERING, WAVES OF RELIEF AND HORROR WASHED OVER HER! SHE SAW THAT, TO 'LOVER,' HER CREW HAD BEEN NOTHING BUT WEEDS TO BE UPROOTED...FOR HER SAKE!

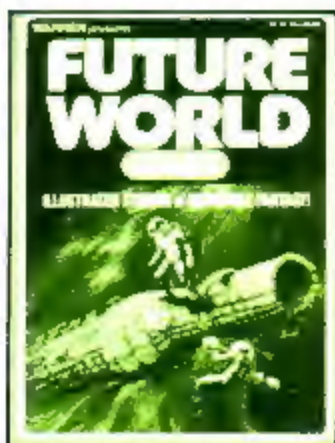
'LOVER'S GIFT QUIVERED AT STEM'S LENGTH...ITS MESSAGE AS PALE AND FRAGILE AS ANY MAN'S EMOTION WOULD BE...ENCASED IN STEEL!

end

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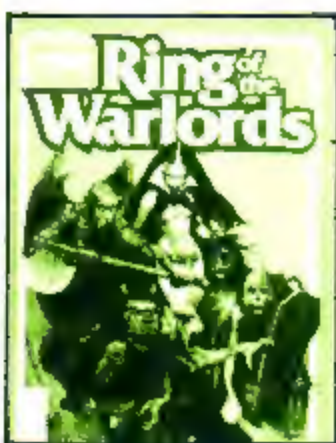
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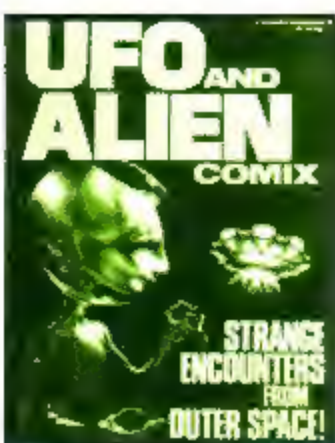
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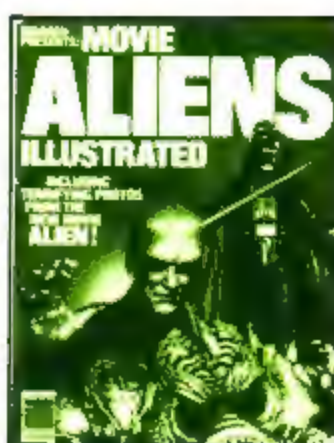
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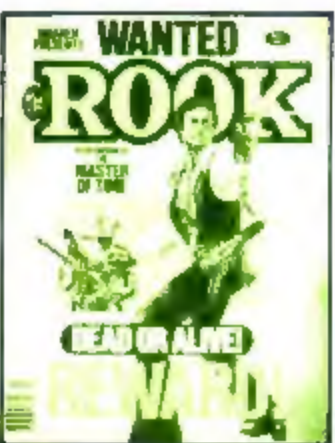
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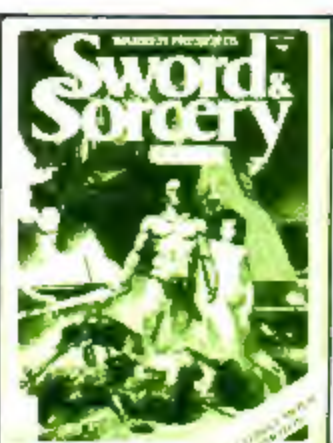
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